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Social justice and special education: Derailing the tracking of Black males.
A case study of Walt Whitman High School

by

Vernon Hall

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Curriculum & Instruction

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2009

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Ms. Ethel Wilson for the bountiful love she bestowed on me. Thank you for believing in me, and for helping me to accept as truth that my (Dis)-Ability was a gift that gave me the insight and a different lens through which I see the world. Thank you for all of your prayers and for instilling in me the faith in God. Knowing that God loves me, and will always love and take care of me in spite of me. Thank you for giving me the courage to go after what I want, and for caring about others.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all the young gifted and Black men who are still struggling academically, socially, and personally. Do not give up, and keep your eye on “the big picture”.

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God's promises to me, the 23rd Psalm.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths

of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

ABSTRACT

The majority of today's African American male students in the public school system are in special education classes. As a result, these schools have either struggled to address or have ultimately disregarded the needs of these ethnically and racially diverse students (Artiles & Trent, 1994). I conclude the widespread misuse and unjust implementation of special education practices and minority assignments to special education programs urgently calls for a paradigm shift.

The function of this dissertation is to demonstrate a need for a new theoretical framework for special education. Additionally, it is to develop an inclusive concept of education that will allow for further research and analysis of the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. In this dissertation, I examined the history of special education from the early 1600s until the present day and traced its impact upon African American males in particular. This historical perspective provides insights into how we have arrived at our current situation and, moreover, makes apparent the urgent need for change.

The overall research question in this study investigates the conditions necessary for African American males to successfully attain an equal education. As such, a case study was constructed to research in an urban high school in a Midwestern city which served as the research site. Portraiture methodology, as defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), is a qualitative inquiry method that results in a complex and subtle narrative, guided the research and subsequent report of the findings. The theoretical lenses that shaped this research were multiculturalism and Critical Race Theory. The purpose of this research, which utilized a qualitative case study design, was to understand how some schools in urban cities

provide their special needs students with an equal education; and consequently, reduce the overrepresentation of African American Males in special education.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The majority of today's African American male students in the public school system are in special education classes (Jordan & Cooper, 2003). Despite efforts to improve ineffective schools and reduce the number of Blacks in special education programs, 13 percent of African Americans males in public schools in special education classes. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2003), minority students constituted 39 percent of public school students in kindergarten through 12th grade, of which 17 percent were African Americans. Black students are more likely to receive special education services than Whites, Hispanics, or Asians/Pacific Islanders (Reynolds, 2006). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) helps children with disabilities received special education. In the 1999–2000 school year, 13 percent of all children, 3 to 21 years old, received services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The proportions of Black and American Indian students served (15 and 14 percent, respectively) are higher than the proportions of White, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students served by IDEA (Reynolds, 2006).

As a result, schools have disregarded or have struggled to address the needs of the ethnically and racially diverse students (Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004). Previous research findings show African American students in the majority of public schools are in significant danger of being mis-educated or are in danger of dropping out of school. Further, researchers seemed to have renewed their scrutiny of the deplorable conditions of special education programs and the continued disproportionate high placement of Black students in special education (Harris et al., 2004).

Research up to this point has maintained that many aspects of public education remain stagnant and segregated for many minority students and, in particular, for African American males (Kuykendall, 1991). According to Garibaldi (1992), for example, an examination of the “New Orleans Public School system in 1987 found that even though African American males represented only 43 percent of the school population, they accounted for 58 percent of the students in almost all categories of academic failure. Further, African American males accounted for 65 percent of the overall suspensions, 80 percent of the overall expulsions, and 45 percent of the overall dropouts” (p. 6). Garibaldi (1992) proposed that the results clearly establish that the academic failure of African American males is set in motion early and leads to disappointment in all aspects of education. However, a survey of more than 2,250 African American males in the New Orleans school district showed that the majority of “African American males do want to be challenged academically” and have a great desire to finish school (Garibaldi, 1992, p. 9).

Most young Black men in the United States do not graduate from high school. “Only 35 percent of Black male students graduated from high school in Chicago and only 26 percent in New York City”, according to a 2006 report by The Schott Foundation for Public Education (Holzman, 2006, p. 34). Only a few Black males who finish high school actually attend college, and of those few Black males who enter college, only 22 percent of them finish college nationally. “Young Black male students have the worst grades, the lowest test scores, and the highest dropout rates of all students in the country” (Weathersby, 2007, p. 4).

Lipman (1998) states,

[...] They (teachers) only see the Black kids as “deprived.” They don’t see kids’ strengths...Teachers need to understand Black kids better....These are issues we would be dealing with if we were serious about (racial) disparities (p. 1).

The overwhelming failure of schools to develop the talents and potential of African American students is a catastrophe.

Many schools are not serving Black students in general; however, Black male students, in particular, are being marginalized and placed in special education classes at an alarming rate (Anand, Fine, Perkins, & Surry, 2002; Kuykendall, 1991). According to Fletcher (2001), the percentage of Blacks who received special education services is substantially higher than the percentage for any other racial/ethnic group (17.4 percent of Blacks compared to 8.2 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 9.4 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students, 8.1 percent of Hispanic students, and 8.6 percent of White students).

Additionally, Maina (2002) has argued one of the major problems with special education is the shortcoming of the individuals who direct and set policies for teachers and students. Kuykendall (1991) has argued many students placed in special education classes are not benefiting from the placement and often develop a sense of worthlessness. As a result of this treatment and the inequity of the education they receive, Blacks have higher dropout rates than their White peers. Additionally, Maina (2002) and Kuykendall (1991) have proposed the system (the reservation of the individuals with power who manage special education) time and again disregards the achievements of many minority students in its charge. Moreover, even when these students are able to create their own meaningful

knowledge, this knowledge is not valued. In fact, these students are perceived as not being able to construct meaningful knowledge, or they are intellectually inferior and incapable of critical thinking (Peterz, 1999).

A number of recent studies have examined the function of special education a quarter-century after the passage of IDEA, which stated special education is an issue that has a negative effect on all students whether or not they have special needs (Rotherham, 2002). At a conference held at the Progressive Policy Institute at Fordham University in 2002, researchers Matthew Ladner and Christopher Hammons presented a paper that analyzed the over-identification of minorities in special education and found race predicts identification for special education more than any other variable they examined. Furthermore, what is most significant about these findings is the fact as minority enrollment in many school districts declined, the identification for minorities to special education increased (Rotherham, 2002). Recent investigations on the over-identification of Black students in special education programs have continued to note that Black males account for 33 percent of students in special education identified as mentally retarded as well as 27 percent identified with emotional disturbances. However, Black students comprise 17 percent of the student population. According to the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (2002), and the National Research Council on Education (2002), Black students are 2.28 times more likely to be identified as mentally retarded and 1.58 times more likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed than White students (Rotherham, 2002).

There is a growing body of evidence that shows there is a continuing dilemma concerning how Black students are identified for placement in special education classes.

According to Peterz (1999), the method of determining how Blacks are placed in special education classes has developed into a no-win situation for countless Black students.

Intelligence (IQ) testing has become a major instrument employed in determining placement special education classes. Peterz (1999) states where placement is dependent upon IQ tests, which have been reported to be biased against minorities/Blacks, Black students represent an exceptionally higher percentage of students enrolled in classes for educable mentally retarded students. The fact 84 percent of all Blacks in special education classes are males and an unusually high percentage of Black students, including students with physical and visual impairment, are more frequently placed in more restrictive and self-contained classes than any other group of students suggests that these tests are inequitable and limit the success of Black males. However, when placement is based on equal measures (i.e., socioeconomics, number of parents in household, etc.), the percentage of Black students in special education classes is more closely proportionate to the overall public school population (Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 1995).

Researchers have proposed different causes for the over-representation of African American students in special education programs and have stated to understand the process in the identification of students with special educational needs, one must be aware the general pattern of racial discrimination that exists in society is often reflected in the school system (Serwatka, et al. 1995). Nonetheless, after a review of the literature, with few exceptions, the reason most frequently offered to explain the over-representation of Blacks in special education programs is cultural differences. In a fundamental sense, it becomes conceivable a lack of uniform identification procedures and biases in the assessment instruments used to diagnose students with special needs, such as forecast tests and

behavioral rating scales, will exacerbate society's perception of the minorities and the poor (Serwatka, et al. 1995).

Statement of Problem

For decades, Black males have been disproportionately at risk of school failure and diminishing life chances. Numerous studies have chronicled the troubled status of Black males in school and in social life (Jordan, 2002; Lewit & Schuurmann-Baker, 1996; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Cartledge, 2004). The phenomenon of the disproportionality of African American males in special education is not a recent concern. Historically, the concern about the misuse of special education emerged in the 1960s and has developed into a way of educating African Americans, particularly males (Kunjufu, 2005). This observable fact has remained unresolved and has developed into a major problem for educators, school administrators, and governmental officials who issue mandates (Cartledge, 1997). The problem of placing African Americans in special education classes became very acute when some educational researchers realized that when African American students were more likely to be placed in the most restrictive classes, they were less likely to transition back to a general classroom (Kunjufu, 2005). Peterz (1999) concludes classrooms not structured to meet the needs of Black male students or have unclear rules and expectations often place these students at risk, which results in higher drop out rates and/or the lack of opportunity to learn and practice pro-social and interpersonal skills or even in the loss of opportunity to develop self-management skills (Harris, et al., 2004 and Kunjufu, 2005).

However, before the 1954 Court ruling of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the phenomenon of the disproportionality of African American males in special education was nonexistent. In fact, it seemed that many African Americans males in

particular, were better educated and cared for in segregated schools. Walker (1996) concluded the African American school community in the segregated South was made to face scores of obstacles in educating African Americans. However, these schools did succeed in providing nurturing educational environments in spite of the degradation of segregation. Walker gives this narrative example of the level of understanding Black teachers had for their students. Elementary teacher Deborah Fuller commented “I would always say there’s nobody who can’t learn at all.” She explained that her effort was to take a child from where he was and to help him to grow from there. When they gained confidence, they usually improved (Walker, 1996, p. 158). In essence, these African American teachers bonded with and motivated their students and enhanced their self esteem. Many of these teachers understood high levels of self-respect keep students from being distracted and establish many opportunities for learning. Thus, these teachers took on added responsibilities while molding their students to be successful outside the classroom (Walker, 1996).

Brown vs. Board of Education Effects on Special Education

In his 1954 ruling, Chief Justice Earl Warren stated,

Segregation of white and Negro children in the public schools of a State solely on the basis of race, pursuant to state laws permitting or requiring such segregation, denies to Negro children the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment (*Brown v. Board*, 1954)

The purpose of the *Brown versus the Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling was to improve the educational opportunities for African Americans. However, African Americans have yet to attain what the *Brown* decision promised. Like *Brown*, the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975 was designed to enhance and

increase the educational attainment of students with special needs. The implementation of *Brown* (1954), as well as IDEA of 1975, have not achieved the desired educational outcomes, either operationally or in terms of equity in academic outcomes, for African American students at present (Royster, 2004).

According to Royster (2004), “re-segregation has increased in recent years, the overrepresentation of minority children in certain categories of disabilities has reached alarming proportions...special education is a place to put [Black] children” (p. 3).

Special education and general education in the 21st century have developed into a dual system of education. As a result, the construct of special education, the placement of Black males into special education, and the meaning of special education in the 21st century remain in a state of flux. In spite of the innumerable questions about the validity of the use of IQ tests as an identification method, Black students continue to be deemed eligible for special education services by virtue of being who they are (Black males) (Royster, 2004, p. 8). Consequently, the implied notion is the characteristics of the individuals account for their need for special education services. For many Black males, the identification process and placement into special education classes starts from the onset of their school careers (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

Current trends in the identification and education of African American students for special education in the 21st century are now based on economic and demographic variables. A study conducted by Oswald, Coutinho, Best, and Singh (1999) using race, economic, and demographic variables concluded “African American students were about 2.4 times more likely to be identified as mildly mentally retarded (MMR) and about 1.5 times more likely to be identified as seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) than non-African American students”

(p. 199). This research supports the argument race, economic, and demographic variables influence the identification of minority students for special education.

The challenge for these students is not to be identified in any way as a problem for the teachers or the school. However, if by chance the student is seen as a problem, whether by assumption or by misunderstanding, the ramification is referral to special educational services. In most cases, the instructional strategies used with Black children are, according to Harry and Anderson (1994), pitiful. One example is the actual amount of time spent on academic tasks in the classroom. They have argued Black children spend significantly less time directly engaged in academic learning than do their counterparts. As a result, learning or the experience of learning seldom takes place for many of these students. The characteristics of learning or the experience of learning involves interaction between the learner and the external condition in the environment to which he or she reacts. Learning takes place through active interaction within the environment; it is the experience that aids in the learning process (Tyler, 1949). Winzer and Mazurek, (2000) suggested practices currently seen in special education programs are erected on a long and reprehensible history, a history which mirrors the contemporary societal trends and perceptions of minorities and the poor. As a result of the general perception and governmental legislation on educational reform and the current atmosphere in general education system, it becomes evident more weight is placed on the student's ability to test well than on creating or providing an environment that fosters and/or encourages the construction of knowledge where individuals provide a shared context of multiple points of view (Gay, 1994).

The crux of the matter is there are five general principles involved with the experiences of learning: constructivism, context, change, distribution function, and the social

learning principle (Tyler, 1949). However, a number of studies have shown the general principle involved with the experiences of learning within special educational classes does not allow the student to become an active participant within the environment that fosters learning or provides that experience needed for learning to happen (Tyler, 1949; Kuykendall, 1991; Delpit, 1995). In the reviewing the literature on the identification and removal of African American students from general education to special education classes, it has become evident many teachers frequently identify African American male students as being undesirable and indifferent to the culture of the classroom regardless of social class (Tatum, 1997).

Ogbu (1988) raised the question of how much does the social class of the student (African American) shape the school experience and outcome. He concluded middle-class African American males do better in school; however, the academic lag is not restricted to the underclass. Middle-class African American children do not do as well as their middle-class White counterparts. In fact, they are referred to special education programs at a rate equal to Black students from a lower social class (Weis, 1988). Consequently, teachers repeatedly call attention to any behavior they may view as indifferent or inappropriate, resulting in the teacher becoming increasingly short-tempered and authoritarian toward the student (Noguera, 1996).

Worth (1999) has argued in order for a child to qualify for special education, the child must be diagnosed as having a disability, and the disability must be found to adversely affect his or her educational performance to the extent that special services are required. Consequently, special education has become the method in which Black school-age children are now being educated. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (as cited in Holzman,

2006), a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based organization created to promote equity in education, recently released a report on education and Black males (Holzman, 2006). This report showed Black students accounted for 72 percent of the total number of students classified under mental retardation in Chicago's public schools, while Black students accounted for only 52 percent of overall enrollment (as cited in Samuels, 2004).

In addition, according to Hayes and Price (2000), an important factor in the overrepresentation of African American males in special education can be attributed to the fact the majority of public school teachers are predominantly new and White women who are inexperienced in the classroom and who often have negative views of African Americans (Kuykendall, 1991). A significantly high proportion of researchers in this area (i.e. Losen & Orfield, 2002; Tatum, 1997; & Kunjufu, 2005) are concerned with the impact of White women who may also have negative expectations regarding Black males' ability being the dominant educators of Black males. This problem arose shortly after school integration occurred in segregated school systems where African American children had previously attended schools operated mostly by skilled African American educators. However, the impact of school integration led to the loss of jobs for 38,000 African American teachers and administrators between 1954 and 1965.

Consequently, there is still a shortage of African American teachers and administrators today (Holmes, 1990; King, 1993). A study conducted by the National Education Association (1997) reports during the 1995-1996 school years, African American teachers comprised only 7.3 percent of the teaching force in the nation's public schools. In a report conducted by Elizabeth Green, a staff reporter for the Sun (2008), she states that in New York City the percentage of Black teachers has fallen substantially since 2002, dropping

to 13 percent in the last school year from 27 percent in 2001-02. Green (2008) has also argued the change has dramatically altered the racial makeup of New York City teachers' workforce, which last year included about 400 more White teachers and about 1,000 fewer Black teachers.

Purpose of Study

The disproportionate placement of African American males in special education programs has for 30 years caused a state of crisis. Accordingly then, one objective is to construct a "framework for success." The researcher believes such a framework can potentially give all educators and educational institutions the opportunity to change the demeaning construction of special education in America for all. It is safe to say the ultimate objective of this research is to embark on a process for change in schools with the probability of eventually extending the concept into the larger society.

This study examines an urban high school that appears to be successful, where special education is not used as a dumping ground for minority and poor students. It is a school where students needing special education are in the least restrictive environment possible (which will be discussed in the findings), an environment that ensures special education students with special needs are not unnecessarily segregated or treated in a way that is not equal to that of general education students. Therefore, through this study, this researcher presents a case study that reflects the various processes Walt Whitman High School, located in a Midwestern city, uses in combating the negative aspects of special education. As such, this researcher creates a framework that reflects these processes. In doing so, a detailed description of the surrounding and inner environment of this urban school is provided in this case study.

Research Questions

In order to investigate the practices associated with the successful matriculation of African American students (males) attending Walt Whitman High School in a Midwestern city, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the necessary components identified by a school that serves a large population of students with special needs that successfully addresses disproportionality?
2. What are the stated goals of special education within this setting, how well are these goals being met, what roles do these goals play in the special education placement in this school, and what other characteristics impact the special education program goal attainment in this school?
3. What components are possibly missing from the framework used in this school setting that may lead to deeper understanding of the needs of special education students and perhaps even greater success in their appropriate placement?
4. Do racial differences among teachers, administration and student's influence special education decision making and service delivery in this school, and how important are the classroom interactions between students and teachers?
5. How important was multicultural training to special education teachers in this high school, and which training programs/classes/in-services were found most useful and why?

Methodology

This qualitative dissertation used portraiture as its methodology. The goal of portraiture is to paint a vivid portrait or tell a story that reflects meaning from the perspective of both the participants and the researcher. In using portraiture as a methodology, the researcher seeks to record and interpret the perspectives, the essence, and the experiences of the people being studied by documenting their voices and visions. Portraiture freely allows the researcher to also incorporate the perspective and culture of the school and the surrounding environment. The totality of the environment plays a major role in this study, in that it takes every factor into account when constructing a framework allow the researcher to interpret all aspects of a case through a multicultural lens, (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Setting for the Study

Freiberg (1993) has pointed out during the last three decades educational researchers have focused primarily on the horrific shortfall of urban schools and their inability to educate minorities and those in our society who are at the bottom of the social economic ladder. Although American public education is based on a common school ideology that declares and promotes equal educational access to all, far too many African Americans and other young people in our society have been systemically denied the basic fundamental education, which is the bedrock for future occupational attainment. As a result, future opportunities have in large part been eradicated (Braddock & Dawkins, 1988). However, Freiberg (1993) has put forth the following questions that are relevant to this current research.

[...] yet, why do some schools in deteriorating inner-city neighborhoods go well beyond the minimum to provide their students with the skills and abilities they need

to not only survive but flourish in the most adverse condition? How are some urban school administrators able to improve parents' perceptions about their children's schools enough to stem and reverse the rising movement of students from inner-city schools to suburban and urban magnet school and private and parochial schools? What strategies do staff at successful inner-city schools use to move beyond a focus on disciplinary issues to focus on instruction? (p. 364).

According to Freiberg (1993), these questions reflect an area of research that has had minimal exposure in much of the recent literature on education in the inner-cities. Freiberg has also argued researchers have given little theoretical attention to the successes that have occurred within many of the urban schools. The question facing many educators working with urban youth is what educational strategies are working? How are these strategies implemented by the administration and faculty at school to improve student learning and community involvement in children's educational success? Previous research findings have shown there is common concern among urban educators, a concern that illustrates a pressing need for change in curriculum, classroom practice, and school climate (Burke, Martha, & Linker, 2008). Studies have shown students most at risk for educational failure are less likely to attend schools that employ successful practices. The schools they attend tend to be of lower quality and less safe and provide fewer learning opportunities. The climate and instructional practices in schools attended by economically disadvantaged students tend to offer them fewer incentives or opportunities to engage in school activities and to invest the effort for academic success. With that in mind, this researcher ascertained the characteristics of a thriving urban high school, Walt Whitman High School, located in a Midwestern state.

Opening in 1926 as a junior high school, Walt Whitman became a new breed of magnet high school. It is now a special education feeder school serving eight juvenile group homes with programs and special services designed for the students who are transferring from group homes to high school. Currently, Walt Whitman High School has 966 students in the 2007/2008 student body. This study, through the analysis of the special education teachers, special education case manager, school counselor, and administrator, provides information regarding the roles of special education teachers, counselors, and vice-principals in school communities and on the factors that contribute to the construction of those roles and their success in their respective roles.

Significance of Study

The importance of the issue of disproportionate representation of African Americans and other minority students in special education is evidenced in the fact the problem has been studied twice by the National Research Council (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Findings of these reports and others (Eitle, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004) have indicated research must examine the problem on a smaller scale and from different perspectives to better clarify variables involved in and find solutions for the disproportionate representation of minority children in special education. This current study will extend prior research in this area by examining the service provided to special education students and, in addition, construct an understanding of service provisions in special education at Walt Whitman High School.

African American males have been disproportionately represented in special education since its inception. A substantial body of research (Fine & Weis, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Tatum, 1997) has shown an ever increasing number of Black males are neither

learning the essentials of literacy, mathematics, history, geography, and science, nor are they learning to be critical thinkers. They are far too frequently abused by teachers (mentally) and placed in situations damaging to their psychological development (Strickland, & Holzman, 1989).

The basic assumption in the construction of the American educational system is an individual's educational and occupational attainments are developed in large measure through effective, cognitive developmental experiences in schools. In spite of the significant roles played by families, communities, and other social institutions in aspiration formation, schools are the primary institutions in which educational socialization occurs. Yet, schools, which are the chief societal institutions of change and democracy, have failed miserably in providing even the most basic opportunities for the development of literacy, social skills, and values for far too many of those they serve, especially African American males (Braddock & Dawkins, 1988). One can safely ask what, then, is the crux of the matter. In other words, what is the problem?

Balfanz & Legters (2004) has proposed fifty years after *Brown vs. the Board of Education*; public high schools have not yet been able to provide all children with an equal opportunity to receive a quality education. Current reality, however, offers a much more troubled picture. African American males in more than half of the nation's high schools do not graduate and, to a much lesser extent, leave high school prepared to fully participate in civic life. In a study conducted by Balfanz and Legters (2004) for the National Center on Education in the Inner-Cities, concluded that

[...] Nearly half of our nation's African American students, nearly 40% of Latino students, and only 11% of White students attend high schools in which graduation is

not the norm. More than half of African American students in Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania attend high schools in which the majority of students do not graduate on time, if at all. African American students in these states are up to 10 times more likely to attend a high school with a very weak educational practice, and experience a high dropout, and low graduation rates than White students” (p. v).

Research up to this point has maintained that many aspects of public education remain stagnant and segregated for many minority students and, in particular, for African American males (Kuykendall, 1991). Many schools are not serving Black students in general; however, Black male students, in particular, are being marginalized and placed in special education classes at an alarming rate. Patton (1995) has stated that the education of Black males can best be conceptualized within the structure of what they experience in America and more so in their educational experiences.

Utley and Oblakor (2001) have contended that in theory the American educational system is based upon the democratic philosophy of equal educational opportunities for all children. They reasoned that it is on that premise children of all cultures, language, gender, and exceptionalities are educated. Therefore, the objective of this dissertation is to construct an educational framework (A template that will replicate a successful special education program) that can assist in the restructuring of the old and outdated educational model that negatively affects the educational outcome by operating against African American males in school and society and by frequently placing them in special education programs.

This researcher concludes that the widespread misuse and unjust implementation of special education practices and assignments to special education programs urgently calls for

a paradigm shift. This new special education paradigm should be one informed by social justice and equity pedagogy and one rooted in critical multicultural education. As such, this dissertation demonstrates that there is a need for a new theoretical framework for special education that draws heavily from the field of multicultural education and the theoretical perspective of Critical Race Theory. These theoretical lenses are discussed in detail in the methodology section of this dissertation. However, the next chapter offers a literature review of the history of special education and its impact on the educational experiences of African Americans.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are provided to assist the reader in the comprehension of the text. These definitions are from multiple data sources.

- *Contrapposto*: (pronounced con-tra-pos-to) – “Italian term, meaning to represent freedom of movement within a figure, as in ancient Greek sculpture, the parts being in asymmetrical relationship to one another, usually where the hips and legs twist in one direction, and the chest and shoulders in another” (Prienne, 1970, p. 2).
- *Disproportionate Representation*: “Unequal proportions of culturally diverse students in special education program” (Chinn & Hughes, 1987, p. 43).
- *Disproportionate representation*: “Variations in ethnic representation in special education that indicate a particular group is over- or underrepresented” (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000, p. 140).
- *Educational Equity*: The educational policies, practices, and programs necessary to eliminate educational barriers based on gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, color, disability, age, or other protected group status (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2004)

- *Emotional Disturbance (ED)*: “A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance--

(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems" (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.7(c)(4)(i)).

“As defined by the IDEA, emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance” (Code of Federal Regulation, Title 34, Section 300.7(c)(4)(ii)). Emotional disturbance is also referred to as emotional/behavioral disorders or behavioral disorders.

- *Environment*: “Culture of the school, culture of the individual home structure, the building structure” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 41).
- *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*: To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities (including children in public or nonpublic institutions or other care facilities) are educated with children who are nondisabled. Removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when

the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. US Department of Education. 1997a. 20 U. S. C. 1412(a) (5) (b)).

- *Mental Retardation (MD)*: “Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance” (Code of Federal Regulation, Title 34, Section 300.8(c)(6)). Problems with adaptive behavior in the areas of communication, personal needs (dressing, feeding, bathing, etc.), health and safety, living (cooking, cleaning, etc.), social, learning (reading, writing, and basic math), and employment are a part of this disability (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1401(3); 1401(30)).
- *Miss-Education*: The systemic denial of a basic fundamental education (Hall, 2005).
- *Multicultural Education*: “An idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so male and female students exceptional students and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically” (Banks & McGee-Banks 2004, p. 5).
- *Multicultural lens*: Refers to the cultural lens through which one sees the world (Nieto, 2000).
- *Methodology of Portraiture*: “A genre of inquiry and representation that seeks to join social science and art. A method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and

- subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3).
- *Naming Convergence*: “A process of identifying emergent themes” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 215).
 - *Poverty*: Deprivation of common necessities that determine the quality of life, including food, clothing, shelter. An economic idea related to power and the uses of it; it is ingrained in our total culture and involves all our institutions (Chamberlin, 2001, p. 198).
 - *Race*: “The self, as well as societal, imposed definition of a person or Group” (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 6). “Usually refers to the concept of dividing humans into populations or groups on the basis of various sets of characteristics. The most widely used human racial category are based on visible traits (especially skin color, and self-identification” (Tatum, 1997, p. 90)
 - *Racial Identity*: “Determining for oneself, the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group” (Tatum, 1997, p. 90).
 - *Racism*: “A system of privilege based upon race and upon the maintenance of White supremacy” (Murrell, 1999, p.7).
 - *Risk*: “Chance; exposure to chance of injury or loss” (Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1995, p. 1011).
 - *Special Education*: “Specially designed instruction and related services provided to students with disabilities, ages birth to 21. These services are provided in an environment as near to an average classroom as possible.” (Harry & Anderson, 1994. p. 23). “Additionally, Special Education also includes specially designed instruction

to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 1997a).

- *Specific Learning Disability (SLD)*: “A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. According to the law, learning disabilities do not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage” (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.8(c)(10)).
- *Triangulation*: “Is used to indicate that more than two methods are used in a study with a view to double (or triple) checking results” (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003, p. 5).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The assignment of minority students and students of color to special education classes has for many years been a difficult and complicated problem for educators (Artiles, 1998). As a framework for examining these complex issues in this current study, this chapter reviews theory and research related to the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education. In addition, this study investigates the social construction, historical context, and poverty, as they relate to special education. Additionally, this current study reviews strategies used by some successful urban schools to provide their students with the necessary skills needed to succeed not only within the school constructs, but also within society.

Dewey (1916) has argued “there is accordingly a marked difference between the education that everyone receives from living with others and a deliberate education of the young” (p. 7). As one reexamines the historical context of compulsory education in America, and in particular special education, it becomes apparent that the history of the American public educational system is a history that is replete with defining moments in the quest among disenfranchised groups for equal educational opportunities. This quest is most apparent within the African American community (Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004).

According to Winzer (1993), “The way that children are trained and schooled is a crucial demonstration of the way that they are perceived and treated in a given society (p. xi). Additionally, Fine and Weis (1998) make this point, “the manner in which a society treats those who are weak and dependent is one of the most critical indicators that reflects the

general cultural attitudes concerning the obligation of a society to its individual citizens” (p. 161).

Historical Context

According to Winzer (1993), throughout the long, dark centuries around the 1700s, social, political, religious, intellectual, or physical dissimilarity was rarely tolerated. Those who differed from or differed with what a society deemed appropriate and normal were subject to abuse, condemnation, or destruction. Individual differences were considered immoral, and such individuals were locked up in insane asylums and subjected to shocking cruelty with no provisions or aid. It was a time when aversion and distastes characterized the general attitudes of a society towards the disabled populace (Winzer, 1993). However, it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century and towards the start of the enlightenment period in France that disabled citizens started to be educated. The prevailing thought of the French Enlightenment period brought about a transformation in the manner people perceived their world and their role in it. Moreover, by the end of the eighteenth century, special education was accepted as a branch of education in France (Winzer, 1993). Enlightenment ideology was relevant to special education (protecting everyone’s natural rights) in that the education of disabled persons was no longer regarded as unimportant, but in fact, looked at as part of the natural goodness of human kind.

Special education, as its name suggests, is a specialized branch of education. Special education claimed lineage to Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard (1775 - 1838), the French physician who "tamed" the "wild boy of Aveyron" and was an authority on diseases of the ear and on the education of students who were deaf (Winzer, 1993). Most historians trace the beginning of special education as we know it today to Itard. In the early years of the nineteenth century,

Itard found and began to educate Victor a young boy who had been roaming naked in the forests of France for some time (Winzer, 1993). Itard was cautioned by Philippe Pinel, a prominent French physician who was an advocate of humane treatment of insane persons and advised him that his efforts would be useless because Victor was a hopeless case and would not be able to adjust. Nonetheless, Itard persisted in his instruction of Victor and did not eliminate Victor's disabilities, but he did dramatically improve this boy's behavior through patience and educative procedures (Barnard, 1922).

Many of the ideas that Itard first used with Victor were revolutionary for their time. Moreover, a number of the radical ideas Itard used have in fact formed the foundation for present-day special education, such as:

- Individualized instruction, the child's characteristics, rather than prescribed academic content, provides the basis for teaching techniques
- A carefully sequenced series of educational tasks, beginning with tasks the child can perform and gradually leading to more difficult learning
- Emphasis on stimulation and awakening of the child's senses help the child become more aware of and responsive to educational stimuli
- Meticulous arrangement of the child's environment, the environment and the child's experience lead naturally to learning
- Immediate reward for correct performance, providing reinforcement for desirable behavior
- Tutoring in functional skills, to help the child be self sufficient and productive in everyday life. Finally, a belief that every child should be educated to the

greatest extent possible; every child can improve to some degree (Barnard, 1922, p. 35).

Special education and IQ testing

As the United States entered the 20th century, the pursuit of an efficient and accurate way to compare cognitive abilities in humans became a major focus of attention for many educators. History has shown that as far back as “2200 B.C., Chinese emperors have used large scale aptitude testing for the selection of civil servants” (Machek, 2003, p. 3). The exploration of the testing movement in the U.S begins with Francis Galton, who envisioned a test that could predict individuals’ intellectual capacity through tests of sensory discrimination and motor coordination.

One of the major contributors to the testing movement in the United States was James Cattell, an American student of Galton, who provided a name for the test and who in the 1890s brought the idea of intelligence testing to America. Along with Charles Spearman, who restricted the concept of intelligence, there were the following: Stern, who transferred the test to different audiences, Henry Goddard, who translated the test to English along with Robert Yerkes, who distributed the test to thousands of students, and finally Lewis Terman, who ingrained testing into the American way of life (Machek, 2003). These individuals helped transform the American educational system into what it is today. Unlike Binet, these researchers did not really understand the backlash that the testing movement would have on education then and now.

Binet, who developed the successful Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test that would test an individual’s potential, was in 1904 commissioned by the French government to find a method to distinguish between children who were intellectually normal and those who were inferior

(Strydom, & Du Plessis, 2000). The purpose was to put disabled students into special schools where they would receive more individual attention. The IQ Test was developed as a sorting process to differentiate between those children who needed special schooling and those who did not. It is important to note that the aim of an IQ test is to measure the intelligence of a child, which supposedly is an indication of the child's intellectual potential (Strydom & Du Plessis, 2000).

The IQ test constituted a revolutionary approach to the assessment of individual mental ability. However, Binet himself cautioned others against the misuse of the scale or misunderstanding of its implications. According to Binet, the scale was designed with a single purpose in mind: it was to serve as a guide for identifying students who could benefit from extra help in school. His assumption was that a lower IQ indicated the need for more teaching, not an inability to learn. It was not intended to be used as “a general device for ranking all pupils according to mental worth” (Gould, 1981, p. 34). Gould (1981) further points out Binet’s concern about the miss-use of the IQ test by stating “Binet also noted that the scale does not permit the measure of intelligence because intellectual qualities are not superposable and therefore cannot be measured as linear surfaces” (p. 35). Moreover, according to Binet, intelligence could not be described as a single score, and the use of his Intelligence Quotient (IQ) as a definite statement on a child's intellectual capability would be a serious mistake. In addition, “Binet feared that IQ measurement would be used to condemn a child to a permanent ‘condition of stupidity’, there negatively affecting his or her education and livelihood” (Gould, 1981, p. 35). Binet's scale had a profound impact on educational development in the United States. However, the American educators and psychologists who championed and utilized the scale and its revisions failed to heed Binet's caveats concerning

its limitations. Soon intelligence testing assumed an importance and respectability out of proportion to its actual value (Gould, 1981).

According to Gould (1981),

[...] The Simon-Binet Scale, originally designed for identification of children requiring special instructional attention, was transformed into an integral, far-reaching component of the American educational structure. Through Goddard's and Terman's efforts the notion that intelligence tests were accurate, scientific, and valuable tools for bringing efficiency to the schools resulted in assigning the IQ score an almost exalted position as a primary, definitive, and permanent representation of the quality of an individual. Hence, intelligence testing became entrenched in the schools over the next several decades (p. 3).

More importantly, few people realize that the tests being used today represent the end result of a historical process that has its origins in racial and cultural bigotry. Many of the founding fathers of the modern testing industry, including Goddard, Terman, and Carl Brigham (the developer of the *Scholastic Aptitude Test*), also advocated eugenics; a social movement that discouraged reproduction by individuals with genetic defects. In essence, eugenics is a movement that purposes selective breeding of human beings.

U.S. Foundation Period in Education (1900–1960)

The history of education in America is often called foundation of education, which is “the study of educational policy, formal institutions and informal learning from the 17th to the 21st century” (Hartford, 2001). The first American school opened was during the colonial era. As the colonies began to develop, officials in New England began to institute mandatory education for all. The Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1642 made education compulsory, which

was followed consequently by the rest of the state. Still, it was not until after the Civil War that the reconstruction government established universal compulsory public education in the U. S. Consequently, by 1870, every state provided free elementary education. However, during that time the Democrats regained political power and imposed segregation on all schools and public facilities (Gatto, 2003).

More significantly, through laws and the new constitution, African Americans were systematically disfranchised in each of the Southern States. As a result, many African American communities organized to develop their own schools. This was often an attempt to create an environment more supportive than one where hostile White teachers often times disregarded and resented Blacks. With the aid of Northern financial support, some 30,000 African Americans were trained to become teachers, and by 1900, the majority of Blacks in the South were literate. Nevertheless, compulsory attendance regulation did not eradicate exclusionary habits. School districts throughout the United States began an attempt to affect widespread literacy across America. A major point in education at that time was an education that reflected the needs and interests of the society. In that, social, economic, and political forces clearly shaped the American educational system, even to this day (Altenbaugh, 2003).

Large-scale IQ testing

It was during the 1900s, that standardized testing became firmly entrenched in the American educational system. Not only did the use of achievement tests proliferate throughout the educational system, but a whole new category of standardized testing started to gain prominence. One of the first examples of large scale intelligence testing of students occurred in “1917 in Oakland, California. In one academic year, Terman’s IQ test was administered to 6,500 Black and Hispanic students. This is significant not only in the number

of students who took the test, but also because it is the earliest known attempt to classify and group students by innate intellectual ability based on their IQ test scores” (Caruano, 1979, p. 68).

During the 1920s, leaders of the Progressive Educational Reform Movement were early proponents of educational testing. Researchers in the United States, such as Samuel Orton, then a notable neuropathologist at the State Psychopathic Hospital in Iowa City, Iowa, began to reexamine the Europeans’ theory related to reading disabilities (Hallahan & Mercer, 2005). Moreover, Orton set the stage for the study of reading disabilities in the United States and created a professional society devoted to reading disabilities. This society was originally named the Orton Dyslexia Society, but is now known as the International Dyslexia Association.

In 1925, Orton conducted a study in Green County, Iowa, where “88 students who were referred to him were considered defective or were retarded or failing in their school work. After Orton administered the Stanford-Binet IQ test, he determined that many of the students that were tested had IQ scores near-average, average, or above-average. His record showed that one of the participants had an IQ score of 122, four had IQs between 100 and 110, and many had IQs between 90 and 100. Orton then concluded that the IQ score might not always reflect true intellectual ability in students with reading disabilities” (Hallahan & Mercer, 2005 p. 23). Furthermore, Orton speculated that the IQ test is inadequate when used to measure the IQ of an individual with a special disability (Hallahan & Mercer, 2005). Orton’s most well-known finding in reading research is that poor reading skills are associated with an inability to access the phonemic level of language, and thus the phonemic basis of the alphabet code, not on the intellectual ability of the individual (Hallahan & Mercer, 2005).

IQ innate or environmental

At the turn of the 20th century, achievement tests were becoming commonplace in the American educational system. School administrators and governmental officials had become frustrated with the lack of any significant progress among the minority and new immigrants. School officials had accepted the concept that intelligence was an innate characteristic because it suggested that the poor achievement in test scores by many (Black) students was not the fault of the school (Caruano, 1979). During the same time period that intelligence and achievement tests had gained acceptance in America's schools, opponents like Robert Yerkes and Carl Brigham believed that the scientific credibility that had uncritically been associated with intelligence testing may have been premature. Yerkes and Brigham concluded that race will play an important role in how well individuals score on either the IQ or achievement tests. They emphasized the IQ tests were designed to assist in students classification, not measure innate intelligence (Caruano, 1979).

Beginning in the 1930s, most social scientists and the general public recanted their belief that intelligence was an innate characteristic. Educational researchers began placing emphasis on an individual's environment as the most important factor affecting the development of a child's intellect. Nonetheless, by the 1950s, this view was more or less conventional wisdom. (Wigdor & Garner, 1982). It is within this context that standardized testing entered a new era where the belief was that, if intelligence was the product of a person's environment and was not genetically predetermined, then all students could succeed if given the right conditions. Tests, therefore, could be used to open the doors of educational opportunity for all children since they provided the principal way of measuring student progress. No longer were tests viewed solely as instruments by which to sort students

based on innate abilities. Tests now were viewed as a diagnostic tool that would allow schools to improve the education of all children – especially low-income and minority children. In effect, there was a growing belief that tests could be used to democratize American education (Wigdor & Garner, 1982).

IQ Tests and Tracking

However, the reliance on testing that resulted during the first half of the 20th century raised serious concerns that are still hotly debated today. While tests were an efficient and cost effective way of evaluating students, the misuse and abuse of test results was widespread from the start (Oakes, 2005). Many schools and teachers based educational decisions solely on test results. Consequently, students who received low test scores often found themselves disadvantaged as a result of having been “tracked” into low quality courses, or having been denied admission to college. In addition, test scores reflected only part of a student’s abilities, and did not account for the social or cultural differences of the children being tested. These concerns became a major focus of the testing debate at about the same time that the civil rights movement gained national attention (Caruano, 1979).

According to Caruano (1979), and Oakes, (2005), in addition to IQ tests that were used to track students, testing batteries were developed which aided in making standardized tests a permanent fixture in American schools, which also added in furthering the segregation between Black and White students. The testing batteries grouped together many of the already standardized tests being used; however, these new battery of tests would cover all of the major subject areas (Oakes, 2005). The availability of testing batteries subsequently had a major impact on how these tests were being used. Around 1923, there were roughly half a million different tests being used to measure children’s intelligence and achievements. One

of the most well-known testing batteries is the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) developed in 1923 by Lewis Terman, which measured a student's ability in the core basic subjects of that time (Caruano, 1979; Oakes, 2005). The SAT was followed by one of the most highly successful tests that is still in use today, The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). The ITBS originated in 1929 as a scholarship competition run by University of Iowa. The ITBS is similar to the SAT, which was based on the content of the nation's most commonly used textbooks. Like most achievement tests, the ITBS used a multiple choice, matching, true/false, and fill-in-the-blank format. However, one of the biggest problems with the ITBS test was the kind of questions asked. For example, one of the multiple choice questions on the ITBS is "what is a Davenport"? The student must decide if a Davenport is a chair, a sofa, an ottoman, or a bed. These tests cause a lot of criticisms, some concerns are the language used in them next; many researchers and teachers believed that the formats these tests used would encourage memorization and guessing which could not and did not reflect a student's true content knowledge. All the same, by the 1940s many of these tests became commonplace in the nation schools (Caruano, 2001).

Emergent period in special education (1950 to 1975)

IQ testing and the Law

Without question, one of the major defining events of the 20th century was the 1954 *Brown* decision, which initiated educational and social reform throughout the United States and was a catalyst in launching the modern Civil Rights Movement (Caruano, 1979). However, following the *Brown* decision, many formerly segregated schools introduced the use of IQ testing into their schools. Caruano (1979) has argued that for many school districts the introduction of IQ tests was largely an attempt to unofficially continue segregation by

tracking minority students into low-ability groups (Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005). This was just the beginning; the use of tests to track Black students has remained one of the major issues of the testing debate which has continued today (Oakes, 2005). Shortly after the *Brown* decision, the use of tests in making decisions to place minority students in special education classes incites numerous lawsuits.

One of the earliest and most significant special education lawsuits was the 1967 *Hobson v. Hansen* case. The lawsuit was filed on behalf of a group of Black students in Washington, DC, who challenged the use of standardized tests to track students into special education classes on the grounds that such a policy was racially biased. Because the test in question was normed using a sample of white, middle class students, the judge agreed with the students and ruled in their favor (Caruano, 1979).

The best known case involving disproportionate representation in special education is the case of *Larry P. v. Riles* (1972/1979/1984/1986). Landmark cases that shed light on the misuse of special education came about in 1974 with the *Johnson v. San Francisco Unified School District Case* and again in 1979 with the *Larry P. et al. v. Wilson Riles et al.* case. Both *Johnson* and *Larry P.* charged that the San Francisco Unified School District used IQ testing as a discrimination tool against African American students. The judge in this case concluded that the district's Educable Mental Retardation (EMR) classes were dead-end situations. He further claimed that the IQ tests used to assess eligibility for these programs were culturally biased, that they had not been validated for the purpose of special education placement of African American children, and that the statewide testing process for EMR placement revealed an "unlawful segregative intent" (Harry & Anderson 1994, p. 603). As a result of the judge's order, a ban on the use of IQ testing in the state of

California was issued, and they could no longer be used as an assessment measure for placement of students into special education classes (Harry & Anderson 1994).

As a result of the debate over the use of IQ tests, the growing sentiment on the part of Black parents was that the curriculum their children were receiving had become watered down and that Black students were graduating from high schools without even the basic skills needed to succeed in the world. As a result of the many law suits, the federal government started to expand its role, both economically and legislatively, which led to the development of a formal category of special education.

Special Education as a Category

According to Harris, et al. (2004), starting at about 1960 to 1975, learning disabilities began its emergence as a formal category. It was during this period that (1) the term learning disabilities was introduced; (2) the federal government included learning disabilities on its agenda; (3) parents and professionals founded organizations for learning disabilities; and (4) educational programming for students with learning disabilities blossomed, with a particular focus on psychological processing and perceptual training (Harris, et al. 2004).

Samuel Kirk in 1962 formed the term learning disabilities and defined it as follows:

A learning disability refers to retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, writing, arithmetic, or other school subjects resulting from a psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbances. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural and instructional factors (p. 263).

After Kirk (1962) formed the term learning disabilities and defined it, the federal government began to work with several federal agencies such as the Easter Seal Research

Foundation to determine the neurological causes of learning disabilities and to construct a federal definition of learning disability. For all intents and purposes, the problem that had developed was that no one could agree on a single definition of learning disabilities.

Therefore, the federal government sponsored three task forces to construct and develop a working definition of learning disabilities (Hallahan & Mercer, 2005). The first task force, composed primarily of medical professionals, was elected to define neurological causes of learning disabilities. As such they defined minimal brain dysfunction as it relates to learning disorder whereas the second task forces, composed of educators, defined learning disability based on educational management. Consequently, neither Task Force I nor II could agree on a single definition of learning disabilities. Thus, Task Force II put forward two definitions; the first stressed the notion of Kirk's definition which explored intra-individual differences, and the second stressed the discrepancy between intelligence and achievement.

Equally important, the Emergent period witnessed a mass explosion of programs that focused on language, visual, and visual-motor disabilities. The theory was that learning disabilities were a psychological processing problem that could be mended with specific training programs (Hallahan & Mercer, 2005). Nevertheless, African Americans did not factor in any of the studies that were done on individuals with learning disabilities. However, supporters of standardized testing argued that these tests were a way of monitoring the progress of racial minorities, to ensure if inequality was being reduced (Caruano, 1979). Consequently, "by the late 1960s, academic progress was equated almost exclusively with performance on standardized tests" (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1999, p. 9). Additionally, Hoff-Ginsberg (1999) has argued that due to the emphasis placed on test scores, researchers in the 1960s pondered whether the use of test scores was causing a disproportionately negative impact on

minorities as identified by the persistent gaps in test scores. Hoff-Ginsberg (1999) also argued that although the 1960s saw the onset of legal opposition to standardized testing, tests continued to boom largely due to Congress and many state legislatures mandating their use. Consequently the result has been an increased reliance on test scores as the foremost indicator of school accountability.

Disproportionate Representation and Special Education

The disproportionate representation of African-American students in special education has been discussed extensively in the literature (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Dunn, 1968; Fieros & Conray, 2002; Harry, 1992; Harry & Anderson (1004); Oswald, et al., 1999; Parrish 2002; Reschly & Ward, 1991). The major issues in the debates center around the following: disabilities as a mis-labeling of low-socioeconomic status, cultural bias in testing, and problems in the referral and identification processes.

In fact, Dunn (1968) was one of the first researchers to bring the problem of disproportionate representation of minority students in special education to the literature. He argued that special education in its current structure might not be the answer for all students who had been labeled as educable mentally retarded. Dunn (1968) believed there was a moral dilemma with the processes and procedures that occurred in the education of students who were merely economically and socially disadvantaged. He concluded, "... the students who were being labeled educable mentally retarded were students who lived in poverty, in broken homes and were members of low-status ethnic groups" (p. 19). Consequently, Dunn (1968) in his study suggested revamping how students were diagnosed, placed, and taught. He

additionally recommended changes be made in the curriculum to better address the needs of all students.

Does Race Matter?

The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century found Blacks struggling with a multitude of problems, such as unemployment and, most importantly, the education of their children. The subject of Black education became a political and economic issue which brought about a feud for the control of Black education (Anderson, 1988). In addition to the feud among Blacks for the control of Black education, there were studies conducted by White researchers that came up with a hereditary inferiority theory known as scientific racism (Watkins, 2001), which was used to explain the treatment of Blacks and their inability to learn. As a result, the education of Blacks was viewed and still is viewed in a negative way. The outcome of Black education became a key concern with arguments centered on educational reform and inclusion (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

The inability to educate African Americans reflects the views that race is part of the problem (Omi & Winant, 1994). Race is a social structure that causes cultural isolation. Race or the delusion of race and the value placed on the social construction of race has caused many young African American males to be miss-educated. One's race should never be a good enough reason to treat one person differently from another, however that is exactly what we do (Omi & Winant, 1994). One thing that is essentially true is that we will always notice someone's race, but we can no longer act upon that awareness (Omi & Winant, 1994). One of the first things we notice about an individual when we meet them is their race. Race is misused when we use it to provide us with clues about an individual. The ability to interpret racial meaning always depends on the preconceived notions one has about the racial group

(Omi, & Winant, 1994). Accordingly, then, does race matter in the education of African Americans?

W.E.B. DuBois made a valid argument about the problem of the 21st century. The color line divides us still (Ford, Mongon, & Whelan, 1982). In recent years, the most visible evidence of this in the public policy arena has been the persistent condemnation of education and employment for many Blacks (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Americans often forget that as late as the 1960s most African American, Latino, and Native American students were educated in wholly segregated schools funded at rates many times lower than those serving Whites and were excluded from many higher education institutions entirely. The educational experiences for minority students have continued to be substantially separate and unequal. Two thirds of minority students still attend schools that are predominantly populated by minority students, most of them located in central cities and funded well below those in neighboring suburban districts. Recent analyses of data prepared for school finance cases in Alabama, New Jersey, New York, Louisiana, and Texas have found that on every tangible measure, from qualified teachers to curriculum offerings schools, serving greater numbers of students of color had significantly fewer resources than schools serving mostly White students (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Darling-Hammond (2008), purpose that,

[...] Some say that the past is irrelevant; things have changed.

We are now both colors blind and raceless in this nation. Others say just get over it! Times have changed, but do Blacks have the same access to quality education has others do?

In spite of all the controversies about Black education, Black Americans believed that education made economic mobility possible and presented the only means toward the goal of economic freedom (Allen, Beale-Spence, & O'Connor, 2002). During the first part of the 20th century, African Americans labored to ensure that their children would gain access to all possible educational opportunities, even though they were not included in the overall construct (Allen, et al. 2002). However, due to the cultural and racial climate of the United States, this journey had proven to be a challenge. In spite of challenges, and with the assistance of landmark cases like *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)*, progress was made. *Brown* ruled that segregation of students by race was unconstitutional and argued, therefore, that segregated public schools were not “equal” and could not be made “equal,” and that the children hence were deprived of the equal protection of the laws. The *Brown* case set a legal precedent stating that education is a right that must be available to all students on equal terms. The Supreme Court’s ruling also charged that school districts were using special education classes as a cover for segregation (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

What is disproportionality?

In an attempt to fully understand the phenomenon of the disproportionality of African American males in special education, Chinn and Hughes (1987) have defined disproportionality as percentages exceeding, plus or minus 10 percent, the percentage expected on the basis of the overall school-age population in that minority category. For example, “for blacks in 1978 the percentage of total school enrollment was 15.72 percent. According to the 10 percent criterion a range from 14.15 percent to 17.29 percent would be considered proportionate representation for blacks for that year” (p.43). However, data from 1978, 1980, 1982, and 1984 from the Office of Civil Rights Surveys of elementary and

secondary schools in the United States reported that the percentage of minority students in special education programs was 2.7 times their overall enrollment (Chinn & Hughes, 1987).

Artiles and Trent (1994) argued that the over-representation of minority students in special education is indeed a problem and theorized that, with this fact, we must question the efficacy of our professional practices and challenge the basic notion of honoring the diversity that we as a field presumably embrace.

Is White right?

When the issue of race is brought into the discussions of the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education, the obvious part of the discussion is that there exists a larger number of minority students represented in specific categories that ought not be there. According to Marable (1994), “Race is first and foremost an unequal relationship between social aggregates, characterized by dominant and subordinate forms of social interaction, and reinforced by the intricate patterns of public discourse, power, ownership, and privilege within the economic, social, and political institutions of society” (p. 30). Historically, it has been implied that minority students are intellectually inferior, and different from the norm. Heath (1995) states that the White culture represents the norm against which comparisons are made in our society and that Blacks have been traditionally defined for what they lack, Whiteness, rather than for what they have. This deficit view of Black people can often determine White people’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions to those individuals’ phenotypes, interactive styles, language proficiency, and worldviews (Artiles, 1998). Discussions of race in this country evoke strong feelings because of our strong history of race related issues (Goldberg, 1996).

Black Teachers and Representation

Several researchers have noted that when IQ tests or its scores are removed from the equation and race is added the overall picture is different and the crux of the matter becomes clearer, race does matter and is the primary reason for the disproportionate of minority students in special education. For example, in a study conducted by Serwatka, Deering, and Grant (1995) that examined the relationship between the disproportionate representations of African American students in special education programs, the authors found that when African American teachers were more prevalent in the environment, there was a decrease in overrepresentation. This may be related to the ability of African American teachers to better interpret and address behaviors of African American students, thereby decreasing misinterpretations of behaviors and the need for referrals. Another explanation that the authors presented was that African American teachers can serve as positive role models for all students. The authors concluded that there exists a need for more African American teachers in general education settings where African American students are taught in an effort to decrease overrepresentation of these students in special education classes (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

Assessment and referral

In order to conceptualize a further understanding of the disproportionate representation of Blacks in special education, it is important to fully understand the construction of the assessment and referral process within the construct of special education. Several researchers have previously documented the biases that exist in most psychological tests. Hale-Benson (1986) has argued that most psychological tests are strongly centered on White middle class values and culture. One example that she used in her demonstration is the

Picture Peabody Vocabulary Test (PPVT-R: Dunn & Dunn, 1982), while the test seems to be very straightforward, nevertheless, this test too has demonstrated that it can be potentially difficult for many African Americans. With that in mind, it is then easy to understand why historically, Blacks have fared poorly with the many psychological tests that are administered.

According to Lonner (1985), “instruments devised to measure or represent cultural or ethnic variation have been persistently controversial in the cross-cultural sphere, and in fact do not measure the abilities nor can it explain the behavior of many African Americans” (p. 36). Consequently, behaviors that some mental health professionals label pathological are in fact survival skills. Kunjufu (1983) has put forth this following notion: “The very survival skills often needed for continued strength and growth under sometimes severe discrimination, prejudice, and having to deal with an unequal “playing field” can cause African American children, particularly those of lower SES circumstances, to do and perceive things differently than their peers. It can also result in very real difficulties in dealing with the mainstream educational system in productive ways.”

A study conducted on the academic achievement of elementary school students in Prince George County, Maryland, where 65 percent of the students are African American, concluded that African American male students performed comparably to other males of all races on first and second grade standardized math and reading tests. However, by the time they were in the fourth grade, these same Black males experienced a sudden decline in their test scores (Kunjufu, 1983). According to Kunjufu (1983), African American males that have been academically keeping pace with peers from the start of their academic careers, suddenly drop behind their peers even if they were ahead academically.

[...] Comer (1996) documented similar results in the Yale Child Studies, noting that these phenomena were particularly prominent with children from low- income families. As a result of the data from the Yale Child Studies, Comer (1996) surmised that at about fourth grade there is a change in the school environment from encouraging social interaction to a condition of lecturing/listening only. This approach is especially tough on African American males because of teacher response to their relatively high energy levels or behavioral “verve”, a term coined by Boykin 1983 (As cited in Velox, 2004, p 10).

Boykin (1983) argued that because of home experiences and cultural factors, Black children, in general, and Black boys, in particular, do not function well with monotonous, boring tasks. Boykin’s theory proposes that between kindergarten and third grade children are taught how to learn. By the time these children enter the fourth grade the teaching and learning format changes for them. At this stage, children are taught in a more monotonous method. Boykin (1983) further proposes that Blacks do not do as well as Whites in school because the culture of the public schools is constructed towards the home experiences and cultural factors of Whites.

Additionally, according to Stoskopf (1999), the cultural expectation of schools requires conformity, passivity, teacher-focused activities, and individualized non-interactive student participation. As such the ideal student looks only at the teacher, answers questions, and performs only the required tasks at hand. In this regard, Banks (1993) concludes that the teachers’ unrealistic expectations adds to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education.

The initial decision made in the referral and pre-referral process appears to be highly influential in determining the final decision concerning service (Macmillan & Lopez, 1996). In other words, once a teacher has determined a child is in need of special education services, it is more likely than not, the child will be referred to special education evaluation. According to federal law, if a student is suspected of having a disability, a referral is made to evaluate him or her for special education testing. Once the parents sign the permission form for testing, a timeline begins, and the school has 65 days to complete the assessments. During these 65 days, several testing components will be completed to determine the level of services the child needs. If the student is eligible for special education services, the schools then have 30 days to develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for the student. This will consist of accommodations, goals, and describe the services offered. Legally, the students IEP is reviewed once a year, unless the teachers feel that changes are necessary in order to meet the IEP goals (National Research Council 2002). Additionally, a new IEP is written every three years, or as needed. The next big concern is how students are assessed in order to ascertain whether or not they are eligible for special education services. The assessment of a child for special education services is largely the responsibility of the classroom teacher (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006).

More generally, however, another area that is also largely cited as the major cause for the disproportionality of minorities in special education is the concept of biological factors, such as low birth weight, nutrition and development, fetal alcohol syndrome, tobacco, drugs, and exposure to lead. Some researchers have argued that there is not a lot of research to support their conclusion. However, Skiba, et al. (2006) have proposed that in fact, biases in the referral and assessment process is strongly connected to the disproportionate allotment of

minorities in special education, which may not have anything to do with biological factors (Wehmeyer, & Schwartz, 2001).

It is well- documented that males receiving special education services do outnumber females nearly two to one. “The primary explanation for this phenomenon has been that boys exhibit behavior patterns that are more likely to result in their referral to special education. A second reason for this situation may be biological differences in boys and girls. A third reason, one not widely discussed in the special education literature, relates to the impact of gender bias on referral and admission” (Skiba, et al., 2006, p. 1430). However, we must refine the methods to determine which at-risk children will likely demonstrate developmental problems and would likely benefit from early intervention services and/or special education. Additionally, socio-demographic factors such as poverty and environmental stressors all play a role in the referral process (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins, & Chung, 2003). However, a number of studies have shown that these factors may only be excuses that are used to justify the overrepresentation of African American students in special education classes (Skiba, et al., 2003). Moreover, one of the major factors is the inequity of educational resources and instructions for students in urban schools that have been shown to be most effective in discouraging student learning.

Intersection of Race and Poverty on Special Education

Major studies that have examined the impact of poverty on special education have concluded that both share a direct relationship, but some researchers deny its reality (Cross, 2002). What is consistent in these investigations is that there is a relationship between poverty and special education placements (Losen & Orfield, 2002). In explaining the overrepresentation of minority students in special education, a recent report from the

National Research Council (NRC) (2002) has emphasized the impact of poverty. The report offered a theory that exposed the social processes by which poverty was said to impair a child's development. This report was consistent with mainstream literature in special education: the report maintained that minority students are more likely to be poor and that being poor heightens exposure to social risks that compromise early development and increases the need for special services.

Poverty and other environmental factors outside of school such as socioeconomic status have been found to contribute to a heightened incidence of disability in significant ways (Losen & Orfield, 2002). Poverty and its associated problems definitely impact schools and students. Therefore, a closer examination of poverty and its impact on the life of minorities may shed light on how it impacts the educational system. Some studies have in essence affirmed the fact that American social structures and institutions are seen as the cause of poverty (Chamberlin, 2001). Unfortunately, several researchers have taken the position that poverty is thought to be due to the inadequacies of poor people, in particular African Americans, which is a popular belief in America, but not the reality. Chamberlin (2001) has argued that with few exceptions "Poverty is embedded in the American culture and involves all of the institutions. As such, the structures and practices in many American institutions perpetuate poverty" (p. 69).

The NRC (2002) report also attempted to conceptualized the impact that poverty has on education by constructing a bell curve; the report proposed that,

[...] if we plot achievement as "a normal distribution, with the main population representing a hypothetical circumstance of a general population in which students differ in achievement because they themselves differ and because their environments

differ within an average or low risk range,” students with special needs represent some portion of low-achieving students whose academic performance situates them within the left tail of this “normal distribution” (NRC, 2002, p. 96).

In explaining the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education, the NRC (2002) report suggests that poverty does, in fact, impact the number of Blacks represented in special education programs. Additionally, this study put forth the following idea: because Blacks are more likely to be poor, and being poor increases one chances of developmental and social problems, being Black and poor are at a greater risk for special education placement (O’ Connor & Deluca-Fernandez, 2006).

Nevertheless, how does poverty increase the need for special education? In an attempt to answer the above question, researchers such as Blair and Scott (2002); Fujiura and Yamaki (2000); Park, Turnbull, and Turnbull (2002); and Wagner (1995) have concluded that poverty increases the probability of difficulties in learning, which will lead to the need for special education services (Yeargin-Allsopp, Drews, Decoufle, & Murphy, 1995). Additionally, by using the Theory of Compromised Human Development (TCHD), they were able to conclude that there is some baseline risk associated with being poor. For example, higher probability of being mildly mentally retarded (MMR), emotionally disturbed (ED), or having a learning disabled (LD). The researchers additionally summarized the following:

1. Minorities are more likely to be poor.
2. Being poor increases exposure to risk factors that compromise early development.
3. Compromised early development impinges on school preparedness and suppresses academic achievement, heightening the need for special education.
4. Thus minorities are more likely to warrant special education (as cited in O’Connor

& Deluca-Fernandez, 2006).

However, there is one major variable or construct that the above researchers did not consider in their study. That is, does poverty affect access to educational resources (e.g., books, affective instruction, etc). While all children have access to education, the type of education they get is strongly influenced by their family's socioeconomic standing (Cross, 2002). Some minority children are indeed at greater risk of school failure and more likely to be referred to special services because their families are economically or socially disadvantaged and are unable to provide stimulating environments that promote healthy development and school readiness. But, it does stand to reason that some poor children are more likely to be born with low birth weight, have nutritional deficiencies, and suffer from substandard child care in the earliest years of life that may compound school troubles later. These circumstances make the construct of learning and the climate and the nature of classroom instruction all the more important if one is to mend how poor and minority student are educated (Cross, 2002).

Summary

This chapter examined the available literature related to the present study, which focuses on overrepresentation of African American males in special education. The available research gives the present study much from which to draw yet also leaves open spaces for the examination of the multidimensional problematic issues related to special education. The investigation of the historical context of special education was accomplished by reviewing the relationship and use of the IQ test and its historical development. Additionally, the review of the history of education in America and the construct of American education for African

Americans is included in this literature review. This chapter was the medium that propelled me to employ the methodology utilized in this study and described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“To provide high-quality education for all, we must have a vision, but we must also have the will to act. Forging that will is perhaps our greatest challenge” (McGee-Banks, 2002, p. 6).

This chapter will address how the research questions were answered, and will review the theoretical lens through which this story was facilitated. I performed a case study of Walt Whitman High Schools special education program. According to Stake (2000), “case study is less of a methodological choice than a choice of what is to be studied” (p.436).

In this study, I investigated the special education model this school utilizes in its attempt to successfully matriculate its special needs students. As such, the methodology used in this case study aided in constructing a framework that can be used to understand and speak to the dilemma of many special education programs.

The old saying ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ comes to mind when considering the education of children in special education programs. To that end, and “for the sake of our children, we the relatively conscious few must labor, no matter how impossible that may be”, to ensure all of our children have the opportunity, through a reformed educational system to be the best they can be (Baldwin, 1963, p. 104-105).

Portraiture as Methodology

The consideration of this study is based on the manner in which I would collect and analyze data and on the multiplicity of data sources (i.e. interviews, observations, documents, photographs, etc). I realized that the research approach and the methodology will need to blend all of these elements into a product that captures the essence of the environment under

investigation. In other words, this dissertation is a narrative within a narrative or if you will, a story within a story; a story that sheds light not only on the players involved, but a narrative of the environment that this study will showcase. The question of special education and the over-identification of minorities in special education is an issue that has personally affected me and one about which I feel strongly. Therefore, the methodology I decided to employ is Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis' (1997) methodology of "portraiture." Lawrence-Lightfoot (1985) first introduced the idea of social science portraiture as a methodology in their introduction to *The Good High School*. They concluded that discussions about educational practices, philosophies, and research should be built on the imagery of the school's culture, school's environment, and its players. Portraiture is a style of investigation with an ideology that links science and art together in a way that allows the researcher to illuminate the personal experiences of the players and the environment.

Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) have stated:

[...] portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamic, and subtlety of human experience and organization of life. Portraiture seeks to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and visions. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural contexts and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. (p. 3)

The aim of this case study, therefore, is to reconstruct the special education model (through a multicultural lens) by observing and interviewing personnel from a Midwestern

high school, Walt Whitman,¹ in their effort to address the discriminatory nature of the American special educational system.

The goal of portraiture is to paint a vivid textual portrait or to tell a story that reflects meaning from the perspective of both the participants and the researcher. In using portraiture as a methodology, the researcher seeks to record and interpret the perspectives and the experiences of the people being studied by documenting their voices and visions. Portraiture also allows the researcher to freely incorporate the perspective of the surrounding environment. In portraiture, the surrounding environment plays a major role in the study; in that, each factor is taken into account when constructing a framework. This methodology uses naming convergence as a method to analyze the data. Naming convergence is a process that involves sifting through the data, filtering out the significant information, identifying patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what is revealed. Lawrence-Lightfoot, & Davis (1997) assert that “Portraiture is based on a belief in narratives or stories as primary and valid structures through which personal and professional identities are framed, sustained, and shared” (p.199).

The key idea with portraiture is that the researcher creates a complex image of the person/situation/relationship that is to be researched. The researcher is positioned as one of the principal "meaning makers" who creates an interpretation of a life. The interpretation, however, is not only theoretical, but works through shared images, metaphors and stories rather than abstract ideas. In this method, the balance between the creator (researcher as meaning maker) and the created (the text/image/case) is critical because it “results in a co-construction of meaning in which both parties play pivotal roles” (Lightfoot, & Davis, 1997. p. 29)

Qualitative researchers want to enter the worlds of the people they study, get to know them, and ultimately represent and interpret these worlds. It follows that qualitative writing tends to be rich with quotation, description, and narration as researchers attempt to capture conversations, experiences, perspectives, voices, and meanings. Most generally speaking, the purpose of qualitative research is to understand human experience to reveal both the processes by which people construct meaning about their worlds and to report what those meanings are (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Theoretical Perspectives

Serving as both researcher and artist in bringing narratives alive through the art of portraiture, the art or portrait I created was heavily influenced by the lenses through which I engaged with the background (setting), subjects (participants), and the tools of the trade (instruments). As such, this researcher and, therefore, this research were influenced by belief systems arising out of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and multiculturalism/multicultural education.

Critical Race Theory

Du Bois' (1904) perceptive assertion of the problem of the twentieth century is still a challenge which many Americans have not fully accepted and have denied its reality that race does, in fact, matter. The challenge then is to understand that race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) asserts three fundamental hypotheses; the first is that racism is "normal, not abnormal in American society", second, CRT challenges racial oppression and the status quo; third CRT examines interest-convergence. The underlining assumption of interest convergence is that many Whites will tolerate racial advances for

Blacks only when it promotes White self-interest (Delgado, 1995). The suppositions that are analyzed in this study is CRT's first fundamental hypothesis, which suggests that racism is difficult to eradicate because it is interwoven into the American society, and that it is accepted as ordinary. Consider this example, the fact that many Blacks anticipate being treated in a certain way when they enter an establishment that is predominantly White. Blacks instantly have their defenses raised for an impending personal attack and when the attack does not occur they are relieved, but nonetheless stay on guard for the next time (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Unfortunately, Black people understand this supposition and see it as normal when their children are miss-educated. Given the preceding context, and in a fundamental sense, the underlying crisis in Black America is twofold: too much poverty and the deep-seated construct of race that have systematically rejected Blacks. Basically, the success or failure of Black students is constructed in the framework of every day life in schools (Lipman, 1998).

In an attempt to understand racial issues and the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used as a lens of analysis to examine this issue. The fundamental element of CRT used in this study is that racism is "normal not abnormal, in American society" (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Toni Morrison (1992) once argued that, "race is always present in every social configuring our lives" (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 2). It is reasonable to assume from the above narrative that no matter what area of life a Black person advances into, his/her downfall will always be his/her race (Ladson-Billings, 1999). This is because the United States of America is a society that has not yet resolved its racial issues. Race continues to play a very important part in how Americans see and group individuals. Take for example, the concept of "Good and Bad";

every thing that is good is looked upon as being White and everything bad in look upon as Black. This ideology is embedded in our consciousness constructed by Whites like Willie Lynch, who in 1712 proposed a set of methods for controlling Blacks for 300 hundred or more years (Gresson, 1997). Many of the methods that Willie Lynch used (fear, distrust, and envy) to control Blacks are still employed to control Blacks today. Moreover, these methods are still being used in public schools now 55 years after *Brown*.

We can still see and hear the voices of old slaves like Hannah Crafts, a slave who was taught to read and who also had a deep desire to learn and to pass on what she had learned. Her deepest desire, in fact, was to also teach other slaves to read. However, she understood that, if detected, the discovery would have entailed punishment on all the other slaves. The miss-education of Black Americans is not a new phenomena. Black Americans have from the time of slavery been denied the opportunity to progress though the doors of knowledge simply because of their race. No wonder the dilemma of race construction is seen as normal. Americans have always perceived Black Americans as not having the intellectual composition for higher thinking and the mistreatment of this group of people in this society again is seen as normal.

In order to extend the scope of race-based practices in Americans schools, one must understand that most of the socialization functions are implemented in the classroom and teachers, as the leaders and organizers of the classroom, are the main socialization agents (Allen, Beals-Spencer, & O'Connor, 2002). Because of America's long dark racial history, we must use all available recourses to repair the racial nightmare that our educational system is in; failure to do so will end in utter destruction. A method that I believe can assist in mending the educational system is multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism

Multicultural education emerged during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It grew out of the demands of ethnic groups for inclusion in the curricula of schools, colleges, and universities. Although multicultural education is an outgrowth of the ethnic studies movement of the 1960s, it has deep historical roots in the African American ethnic studies movement that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Initiated by scholars such as George Washington Williams, Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. DuBois, and Charles H. Wesley, the primary goal of the early ethnic studies movement was to challenge the negative images and stereotypes of African Americans prevalent in mainstream scholarship by creating accurate descriptions of the life, history, and contributions of African Americans (Banks, et al. 2004; Gay, 1994; Nieto, 2000).

Multicultural education is an idea, an approach to school reform, and a movement for equity, social justice, and democracy. A major goal of multicultural education is to restructure schools so that all students can acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse society and world (Banks, 1993).

Additionally, according to Banks & Banks (2004), “Multicultural education seeks to ensure educational equity for members of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups and to facilitate their participation as critical and reflective citizens in an inclusive national civic culture” (p. 23). Moreover, by the late 1980s, multicultural theorists recognized that ethnic studies were insufficient to bring about school reforms capable of responding to the academic needs of African Americans and other minority students (Grant, 1977a). They consequently shifted their focus from the absolute inclusion of ethnic cultural matters to a deeper structural change in schools and, particularly, in special education. During these

formative years, multicultural educators also expanded from a primary focus on minority affairs to the battle field of social issues, such as social class, language, and gender (Gay, 1994).

Multicultural education calls for all aspects of education to be continuously examined, critiqued, reconsidered, and transformed based on ideals of equity and social justice (Gay, 1994). Multicultural education assists in helping students to develop a better sense of self. This development or experience starts the first time a student enters a classroom and is an ongoing process, continuing throughout the student's educational career (Feinberg, 1996). Ladson-Billings (2001) has argued that the essence of America is that it is a diverse nation. The issues of race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and socioeconomic status all have linked together to make the United States a mixed society.

Nowhere is this diversity more observable than in the nation's public schools. Yet, at a time when the educational needs of children are not being met, teacher preparation programs generally offer limited training for teaching in the area of multicultural education. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in special education classrooms. It stands to reason that, if teachers are to teach effectively, they must recognize the students' cultural backgrounds (Delpit, 1992). In spite of this, too many "teacher education programs usually focus on research that links failure and socioeconomic status, failure and cultural difference, and failure and single-parent households" (Delpit, 1992. p. 241).

Multicultural education, by and large, is based on universal concepts that emphasize educational equity and social justice for all. Grant (1977a) has argued that the ultimate goal of multicultural education is to contribute progressively and proactively to the transformation of schools and society. Teachers must not merely take courses that illustrate cultural

difference, but they must also learn about the brilliance that the students bring with them to the classroom (Delpit, 1992).

Unfortunately, the construct of special education, the placement of Black males into special education, and the meaning of special education in the twenty first century remain in a state of flux. Both multicultural education and special educational theories attempt to address some of the same issues (e. g. how to make schools more receptive and supportive of students that are diverse). However, there is a modest amount of literature that connects the principles of multicultural education to special education (Sleeter, & Puente, 2001). The majority of the literature on multicultural education often does not speak directly to the issues in special education (e. g. the cultural differences in learning, the over-identification of children who required special schools, or reduction of the over- representation of Black males in special education), and when information about special education does appear, it usually is in the form of customs and language (Sleeter, & Puente, 2001).

Burke (2001) has argued for a transformation in ideology despite research that acknowledges differences among multicultural learners in terms of how individual culture, family background, and socioeconomic level affect learning; and the understanding that the circumstances in which students grow and develop have an important impact on learning. However, at present, far too many schools are heavily biased toward uniformity over diversity. Burke (2001) has concluded that, “in one sense, the current imbalance in education is easily understood. Sameness is always easier to accommodate than difference, and education practices often have been developed to consciously promote the same education for all students. We have few teaching models that appropriately accommodate both consistent educational values and human diversity” (p. 2). Multicultural education theories

recognize that there is a serious disadvantage for students whose culture teaches them behaviors and beliefs that are different from the norms of the majority culture most often emphasized in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Burke (2001) has taken the position that culture and learning are connected in very significant ways. He further, argues that early life experiences and the values of a person's culture will affect negatively or positively both the expectations and the processes of learning. Burke (2001) has also proposed that culture and learning are connected in very important ways, and states that, "Students whose families value partnership are told to be independent. Students whose culture values spontaneity are told to exercise self-control. Students who are rewarded in their families for being social are told to work quietly and alone" (Burke, 2001. p. 3).

As a field, multicultural education focuses on increasing educational equity for all students. A major concept of multicultural education is accepting all aspects of cultural diversity; understanding, for example, that there is no "one best way" for students to learn, teachers to teach, and the curriculum to be studied (Burke, 2001). Too often, however, students who do not learn through the existing best approach method are labeled disabled because their way of learning does not match the particular method of instruction. Additionally, active students who are hands-on learners may not have the opportunity to interact in a positive way in the classroom without being described as lacking in self-control or being labeled disruptive or hyperactive. Stickney (2003) has argued that when the students' cultures are recognized and the strength of an individual's culture and heritages are acknowledged, teachers are able to use cultural nuances to impact the student's performance.

Another point of intersection that connects multicultural education and special education is the incorporation of student experiences relevant to learning.

More so, special education theories are becoming more and more interested in creating inclusive multicultural educational programs that can have an altering effect on the educational attainment of students in special education (Utley, and Oblakor, 1995). The purpose, then, in this dissertation is to integrate the philosophy of multicultural education to the field of special education. The over-representation of culturally different children in special education has been regarded as one of the most significant and longstanding issues in education. In spite of all the attention and resources devoted to the issue of the over-representation of Black males in special education over the past three decades, little if any positive solutions have been made in correcting this problem. Some opponents of multicultural education have voiced their concern that multicultural education excludes White students. However, both Ladson-Billings (1994) and Delpit (1995) have suggested that multiculturalists ought to rethink or think earnestly about why they have not been able to get across to teachers that multicultural education is concerned not only with the educational achievement of African Americans and other minorities students, but with White students as well. Moreover, many of the new multicultural education reforms that are designed to increase the academic achievement of minority students will also help White students' improve academically also.

The over-representation of minority children in special education is regarded as the most problematic issue facing educators today (Dunn, 1968; Kauffman, Hallahan, and Ford, 1998). Several researchers have noted that research agendas based on tests and procedures alone do not answer the question of the overrepresentation of minority children in special

education or how to remedy special education (Chinn, and Hughes, 1987). Several researchers have taken the position that culture creates a way of learning and that African American males have similar ways of learning which are different from females. As such, Chinn, & Hughes (1987) have argued that “it is the cultural meaning systems which students bring to school, as well as other related sociocultural and cultural factors that interact with schools” (p. 85). Chinn, & Hughes (1987), in their study, arrived at the conclusion that a better understanding of both culture and learning style differences is needed if the American educational system is going to repair the structure that exists currently.

Setting

The urban Midwestern school district in which this research was conducted has a majority African American student population. However, the community remains majority White upper middle class. Additionally, my major professor had previously visited the school and had walked away with optimistic sentiments about the vice-principal and the outstanding work he was doing with the addition to the special education program at the school. I decided to focus on this school in order to acquire a clear understanding of what the administration and staff at this school was doing to address the disproportionate overrepresentation of minority male students in special education programs.

Walt Whitman High School opened in 1926 as a junior high school. However, in 1933 the Depression forced all junior high schools to close. Due to Walt Whitman's innovative format with research laboratories (labs) and industrial technology courses (shop classes) it was easily converted to a senior high school shortly after the Great Depression. Walt Whitman High School offers a general college preparatory curriculum and a medical and health career academy in partnership with Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

Additionally, Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered in English literature, composition, English language, U.S. history, Spanish, and chemistry in conjunction with after-school tutoring for all students.

Walt Whitman High School is now a magnet high school. In 2007/2008 the student body was composed of 966 students. Fifty-two students (5.4 %) are White, 559 students (57.9 %) are African Americans, 1 student (0.1 %) is Native American, 52 students or (5.4 %) are Asian Americans, 274 students or (28.4 %) are Hispanic Americans, 127 students (13.1 %) are Mexican American, and 28 students (2.9 %) are multiracial students (Midwestern² Public Schools, 2008).

Walt Whitman High School's special education program is actually one of the larger departments in the school. The special education program is divided into two divisions; a program for students with autism and a program for students with learning disabilities (LD) and behavioral difficulties (BD). The autism program is, in essence, a self-contained program. Many of these students are in the same self-contained classroom for their entire day. The school has four classrooms for this population of students. However, two of the classrooms are for students who cannot function independently and are in need of constant attention. The third classroom is designed for students who do not need constant attention and can function, to some extent, independently. The fourth classroom is designed for students who are able to take general classes and interact with the general student body.

Walt Whitman's autism program employs four special education teachers, two physical therapists, and four teachers' aides. The mean average of teachers' years of experience in this section of the school's special education program is 13.5 years. Additionally, the mean number of students per teacher is 15.2. (Each Individualized

Education Program (IEP) includes courses such as Art and Humanities, Science, History, Mathematics, and English). Additional services provided consist of speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and psychological services. This school also offers parent counseling and training.

The special education program for students with learning disorders and behavioral difficulties is broken into three LD categories, LD 1, LD 2, and LD 3. The LD categories refer to the number of minutes students receive special education services. For example, an LD 1 student receives 90 minutes a week of special education services in arts and humanities, English, or social studies. This category is designed for students who require minimal services. Students in LD 2 receive 150 minutes a week of special education similar to the students LD 1 and in accordance to the student's IEP. However, in most of the cases, these students also exhibit some behavioral difficulties, but spend the majority of their time in the general classroom. The students in LD3 receive 255 minutes a week of special education service in a small, self contained classroom. The students in this category, according to Mr. Vega, "are students who present the most difficulties functioning socially and independently, and are in need of constant attention". Both Mr. Vega and Mr. Ramos stated all aspects of their special education program meet the requirements of IDEA 2004.

Walt Whitman High School employs 51 teachers, 15 (29%) of whom are special education teachers. The total number of special education teachers includes the four who teach in the autism program. Eight of these teachers are males (53%) and seven are females (47%). Of the 15 special education teachers, one is an African American male (7%) and two are African American females (13%). These three teachers work with students who are LD and/or BD. All of the African American teachers have taught special education at this school

for over 10 years; the remaining 12 special education (80%) are White. Moreover, the mean average year of experiences in this section is 10.3 years; and the mean number of student served by each teacher is 18.7. A little over 80 % of the total student population is low income and qualify for free and reduced lunch.

One of the strengths of Whitman High School is seen in its athletic program. Walt Whitman High School's athletic program includes baseball, basketball, bowling, cheerleading, cross country, football, ping pong, soccer, softball, tennis, track, golf, wrestling, volleyball, and swimming. In addition, there are also more than 35 other extracurricular school activities designed to encourage community and teach social skills. Therefore, W. Whitman High School athletic and extracurricular program do provide students an opportunity to interact with each other regardless of cultural and social differences.

A number of studies have shown athletic programs serve an important part of the educational experiences of its students (Payne & Fogarty, 2007). Additionally, research up to this point has shown many more educators have realized athletics is only one part of the total educational experience offered by the school and, as such, must be kept in balance with the rest of the school program. With that in mind, Payne and Fogarty (2007) have argued team sports provide children and youth with many opportunities to grow physically and socially, as well as emotionally. Moreover, physical activities with other children allow them to build social skills through peer interaction.

A Contrapposto³ of the Participants

In order to acquire the information needed to construct a working framework of the special education program and the criteria used by Walt Whitman High School in the

successful graduation of its students in special education programs, I needed to contact staff members who were very knowledgeable about the special education services offered by the school. Since these positions required such knowledge, these staff members were not randomly selected. I utilized purposeful sampling as I needed special education staff members within different roles. The personnel interviewed and/or surveyed for this study are the vice-principal, special education teachers, counselor, special education case manager and, the social worker (see table 2). Because they are closely involved in the identification process for special education and can help reveal what occurs in the process, they are “information-rich cases” (Patton, 1990).⁴

Participant's years of experience

Findings in this study revealed that the experience (see table 2), of the participants played a key role in constructing a meaningful educational environment for their special need students. Recent studies have shown that the experience of the school administration and teachers increases the overall educational outcome of students with disabilities (Frieden, 2004).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Years Teaching or as Counselor	Years Teaching Sp Ed	Years Teaching Sp Ed @ Whitman HS	Years as Administrator @ Whitman	Total years In K-12
Vice- Principal Mr. Ramos	10	N/A	N/A	13	23
Counselor, Mrs. Miller	2	N/A	N/A	2	2
Sp Ed Case Manger, Mr. Vega	12	N/A	5	4	21
Sp Ed Teacher #1 Ms. Moore	19	19	2	N/A	19
* Sp Ed Teacher #2 Ms. Wilson	14	14	13	N/A	14
* Sp Ed Teacher # 3 Ms. Peters	25	25	12	N/A	25
* Sp Ed Teacher #4 Ms. Wright	13	13	3	N/A	13
Social Worker Mr. Martinez	24	N/A	N/A	8	24

Sp Ed= Special education.

* Sp Ed Teachers who responded to questionnaire only.

Selecting the participants

Purposeful sampling involves the selection of information rich cases for indepth studies; there are some 16 different subtypes of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). However, for this study, I employ the subtype “critical case sampling” (Patton, 1990). Critical case sampling permits logical generalization; in other words, if it is true for one case, it is likely to be true of all other cases. The ideology behind this dissertation is that if the special education program works at Walt Whitman High School and if one constructs a framework of their special education program, the same results could be obtained at another site as well.

The comprehensive justifications for selecting the participants are as follows. First, the principal and/or vice-principal plays a significant role in the development of a school culture of inclusiveness, she/he is, after all, the school steward. And as such, his/her views of special education reflect how children in special education are treated. Special education, as it is now, presents one of the major challenges facing school leaders in this era of comprehensive school reform (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Schools currently must provide students with disabilities appropriate access to the general curriculum and effective instructional support (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

The vice-principal, Mr. Ramos, is a Hispanic male who has been at Walt Whitman High School for over 23 years. Mr. Ramos first taught math for 10 of his 23 years at the school and later became the vice-principal. Mr. Ramos, in association with the school principal, is the “go to guy”. It became obvious that he sets the tone of the school environment. For that reason, this dissertation examines his key leadership issues that leads to effective special education programs and reviews emerging standards for vice-principal

performance to determine the knowledge and skills that effective school leaders need and have (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). Effective leadership and administrative support for special education are critical issues in today's schools. In the search for factors that influence school efficiency, the role of the vice-principal has emerged as a critical factor. Yet, according to Leithwood and Montgomery (1992), there is limited research that has focused on the roles of vice-principals and how they work towards improving the effectiveness of their schools.

Ms. Moore is a middle-age White woman who has taught special education in this Midwest state for more than 19 years. She has taught some of the most inclusive special education classes in the program; at the time of the interview she had been at Walt Whitman for two years. Ms. Wilson is a White woman who has taught special education in this Midwest state for more than 14 years, and has taught special education at Walt Whitman for 13 years. Ms. Peters is also a White woman who has taught special education in this Midwest state for more than 25 years, and has taught special education at Walt Whitman for 12 years. Finally, Ms. Wright, also a White woman who has taught special education in this Midwest state for 13 years, and has taught special education at Walt Whitman her entire career.

An essential assumption in this dissertation is that teachers who teach special education play an important role in fostering the intellectual and social development of children with special needs during their formative years. The education that teachers impart plays a key role in determining the future prospects of their students. Whether in preschools or high schools or in private or public schools, teachers provide the tools and the environment for their students to develop into responsible adults (U.S. Department of Labor

Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Accordingly then, teaching is as much about passion as it is about reason as argued by Leblanc (1998).

Leblanc (1998) has also argued teaching is also about having passion and conveying that passion to everyone, most importantly to students. The essence of teaching is not only about motivating students to learn, but teaching them how to learn, and doing so in a manner that is relevant and meaningful. With that in mind, no one can argue that the role of the special education teacher is crucial to the educational attainment of students in his/her charge. Special education teachers provide specially designed instruction to individuals with disabilities. They adapt and develop materials to match the special needs of each student. They work to ensure that students with disabilities reach their learning potential. The creation of a good class requires an immense amount of work, which includes spending time with each student in order to get a better understanding of their learning styles and also to learn about gaps in their understanding of a particular subject. Teachers, according to Leblanc (1998), look at building an exciting and interesting class every day so as to motivate students to excel.

Ms. Miller is a young White woman who has worked at Walt Whitman for two years. At the time of the interview Ms. Miller was the chair of the counseling department.

Mr. Vega, a Hispanic male is the school's special education case worker. He first came to the school 21 years ago as a math teacher and taught math for 12 years. He later became one of the first special education teachers and taught for five years; and has been the schools special education case manger for the last four years. Mr. Martinez, an American Indian, is one of social workers. He has been with the department of education for over 24 years and has worked out of Walt Whitman for the past eight years.

Students with disabilities need a wide range of special related services. At present, many schools provide an array of services to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. Special education teachers alone cannot meet the comprehensive needs of students with disabilities. As such, the special education counselor characteristically forms part of the team of individuals who identify students with special needs and provide appropriate placements. Additionally, Hopkins (2005) has stated that special education counselors have great strategic value. They, in essence, are part of a team of consultants who make decisions about relevant curricular offerings to meet the special needs of students. However, these counselors have received minimal attention in the services that they render to not just special needs students, but, to all students. Herein lies one of the reasons this researcher believes that a special education disability counselor has particular relevance to this dissertation; the following is a statement from a special needs student:

[...] The important thing about our counselor is that she listens. I do know that lots of other people listen, but she listens the most... She tells stories with important morals. She listens to you and tells no one. She is an important counselor. But the important thing about Mrs. Standley is that she listens (As cited in Hopkins, 2005, p.17).

Studies are showing that counseling can improve student achievement and behavior. School counselors at all levels help students to understand and deal with social, behavioral, and personal problems. For the above student all that was important to him was that the counselors knew how to listen to him which helped (Hopkins, 2005).

Sources of Data and Collection Procedures

Qualitative research is characterized by an emphasis on describing, understanding, and explaining complex phenomena. For example, the relationships between students and

teachers. Qualitative researchers attempt to value the environment in which activities occur. As such the focus is on understanding the full multi-dimensional, dynamic picture of the subject of study (Patton, 1990). For that reason, a data collection protocol was developed iteratively during the first phase of the dissertation study. Primary data collections took place over a fourteen-week period. The interview participants are the high school vice principal, special education teachers, the school counselor, the special education case manager, and department of education social worker. Before the initial introduction with the participants, I conducted a pre-site-visit. The pre-site-visit was intended to provide me an opportunity to chronicle the school's surrounding environment. Additionally, I interviewed the special education case manager and attended an IEP meeting with the special education case manager, department of education social worker, and the schools, counselor. On my second visit to the school I conducted the first 30 minute unstructured interview with the Vice-Principal. On my third visit to the site I interviewed the special education teacher and the school's counselor. Further, during the twelve weeks of data collection, three special education teachers filled out a questionnaire that was used to triangulate (the convergence of data from multiple data collection sources, observations, interviews, and questionnaires) the findings and will be discussed in great detail in the next section of this chapter. At the end of this process, I realized I had reached data saturation, which occurs when the researcher is no longer hearing or seeing new information.

Research Instruments

Qualitative researchers use multiple methods of collecting data (i.e. interviews, observation, questionnaire), A great deal of qualitative research is interview-based; at the most basic level, interviews are conversations (Kvale, 1996). Kvale defines qualitative

research interviews as attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point-of-view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, and to uncover their lives. In qualitative research, an interview response provides the researcher with quotations, which are the main sources of raw data. Patton (1998) notes that quotations "reveal the respondents' levels of emotion, the way in which they have organized the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions" (p. 45). The task for the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their point-of-view about the issues (Patton, 1990).

In order to validate the findings in this study, I will use the concept of triangulation. Triangulation is the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. Triangulation was originally used in social sciences and has now spread to psychology (Begley, 1996). In other words, triangulation is simply using at least three different methods to research the same issue with the same unit of analysis (i.e. unstructured interviews, observations, and questionnaires with various participants in the study), thus cross-checking one result against another, and increasing the reliability of the result. Contradictory results often bring up questions about the design of the study, as well as fundamental issues surrounding the researcher's understanding of a topic (Begley, 1996).

In an attempt to triangulate the findings in this study, I also draw on the qualitative methodology of questionnaires. A questionnaire is essentially a structured technique for collecting primary data. It is generally a series of written questions for which the respondents have to provide the answers (Bell 1992).

Observation is used as a research method in two distinct ways, structured and unstructured. For the purpose of the study, I employed the unstructured observation research

method. Observation is used to understand and interpret cultural behavior. The primary reason for using the unstructured observational methods in this study is to check whether what people say they do is the same as what they actually do (Patton, 1990). Observation provides the following information:

1. Provides insight into interactions between groups.
2. Illustrates the entire picture.
3. Captures the circumstance, and course of action.
4. Informs one about the influence of the physical environment (Patton, 1990).

Analysis

The goal of portraiture is to paint a vivid representation or account that reflects meaning from both the researcher and the participant's experiences within the environment. In other words, this methodology seeks to illuminate the complex dimension of the environment under investigation. Lawrence-Lightfoot, et al. (1997) note that, "The portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspective of the people who are negotiating those experiences (p. 3).

To that end, the current analysis is indexed to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), and Davis and Rimm (1989) criteria of portraiture. The analytical stance used is Lawrence-Lightfoot, et al (1997) naming convergence theory, which is an approach for looking systematically at qualitative data, and whose aim is to construct and validate research data. The basic idea of the naming convergence theory approach is to read and interpret the database in order to discover the many different categories, concepts, and themes that arise from the data and to make sense of their interrelationships between groups.

Additionally, this theory must, from the very start, address the question of what does not fit and, at the same time, begin to listen for deviant voices. Given the preceding context, “a deviant voice is a reality in all of our lives. It is both an analytic sociological concept and a lived experience, both a label that is applied and an emotional reality that is sustained” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, et al., 1997). The authors provide an example of a deviant voice: “Under the potential theme of ‘Home’ are there people who are not members of the family whose voices come through when examining the theme of home” (p. 221)

The analysis of interview transcripts, questionnaires, and field notes are based on an inductive approach geared to identifying patterns in the data by means of thematic codes. “Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton, 1990, p. 306).

Analyzing data gathered by qualitative means, “such as audio taped interviews, focus groups, researcher field notes, and others, can be an overwhelming task. There are no established formula for transforming the data into findings” (Lopez & Levers, 2002, p. 93). The challenge of the process is to make sense of the massive quantities of data. The process involves sifting through the data, filtering out the significant information, identifying patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what is revealed (Lopez-Levers, 2002).

Summary

This part of the document provided a description of the research approach I used. It reviewed the rationale for selecting portraiture, the principles of portraiture and its aspects, the research design and activities, and criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of the

research. It described data collection, data analysis activities, the setting, and the, participants. In the next chapter I present the data and findings from the study.

¹ The name of the school has been changed for privacy purposes.

² The name of the reference has been changed to exclude the name of the city for privacy purposes.

³ A Contrapposto a term, meaning to represent freedom of movement within a figure

⁴ All names have been changed for privacy purposes.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

In many urban communities around the country, public school systems are failing African American male students miserably. Many of these students are not succeeding in school and are normally seen as a population at-risk (Bailey, 2003; Bailey & Moore, 2004; Farmer et al., 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; S. E. Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Moore, 2003). Throughout the educational pipeline (i.e., elementary, secondary, and postsecondary), African American males lag behind their White counterparts academically, as well as their African American female counterparts (Jackson & Moore, 2006; J. L. Moore, Flowers, Guion, Zhang, & Staten, 2004; J. L. Moore & Herndon, 2003; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Even when accounting for socioeconomic status, African American males still lag behind these student groups (McGuire, 2005).

This educational trend is certainly evident in urban school systems (Cooper & Jordan, 1990; Council of Great City Schools, 1999) and is also apparent in high income suburban communities as well (Day-Vines, Patton, & Baytops, 2003; Ferguson, 2002; McGuire, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003; Ogbu, 1988). It is also evident that some African American males in some public school systems do better than African American males in other school systems (College Board, 1999; Holzman, 2006; Ogbu, 2003). For example, African American males in Shaker Heights, an affluent suburb near Cleveland, have academically outperformed economically disadvantaged African American males in other parts of Ohio. However, African American males without question

continue to lag significantly behind their White counterparts in the same Shaker Heights school district (Ogbu, 2003). It has been documented that ethnic minority students, particularly African American males, have been overrepresented in our most exclusionary and most restrictive classrooms since as early as 1960s (Children's Defense Fund, 2003), and according to a number of recent studies, the trend has without fail continued (Gonzalez & Szecsy, 2004; Skiba et al., 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

More than 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), African American males continue to experience educational inequalities and inconsistencies in public school systems all around the country. Educational gaps remain disturbing, persistent, and significant. The nation has failed to remedy enduringly educational disparities found among different racial, gender, and socioeconomic student populations. In many school systems around the country, African American male students face an array of social and academic problems that often inhibit their school outcomes. In general, African American males share many of the same concerns their White counterpart share. Among those common concerns are peer pressures, poor peer relationships, heightened sensitivity, and awareness of societal problems (Ford, 1994, 1998). However, the major difference between African American male students and their White counterparts is that they must contend with educational environments tainted by biases, stereotypes, and discrimination (J. L. Moore, 2000, 2001; S. E. Moore et al., 2003).

Yet, there are some schools in urban areas all over this nation that are exceptional; schools that go well beyond the minimum in empowering each student to be a lifelong learner. Take for example the John Dewey High School in Brooklyn, New York, the Hunter College High School and Elementary in New York City, the Northeast Magnet High School

in Wichita, Kansas, the Whitney Young High School, and the Black Magnet elementary schools in Chicago, all are providing their students with the necessary skills and tools need to be successful academically and in the bigger society (McGuire, 2005). One common denominator that these schools have is that they articulate a broad goal of making a rigorous curriculum accessible to students from all backgrounds, empowering each student to be a lifelong learner (Freiberg, 1996). These schools assume and believe that all students are capable of doing high level work, and the students are not tracked into meaningless classes. These schools provide high quality professional development and use outside resources, especially parents, to implement many of the programs. Further, all these schools require parents to volunteer a minimum of 18 and 30 hours per school year (Freiberg, 1996)

The school that is highlighted in this dissertation is Walt Whitman High School in an urban Midwestern City¹. Similar to the above mentioned schools, Walt Whitman High School is one of those schools that offer opportunities to all of its students to succeed. The following report of the findings for the case of Walt Whitman High School is written and guided by the principles of portraiture methodology. Detailed descriptions of my experiences and perceptions, as researcher and participant observer, are provided as I engaged in the environment and with the participants in this study. Generally speaking, qualitative inquiry allows for more narrative and interpretation in reporting results than do more quantitative methods. Borg and Gall (1989) support this claim in stating, “The results of a qualitative study generally are presented using words rather than numbers. Therefore, use of language is critical. The writing of a case study requires a literary flair in order to bring the subject of the case study alive for the reader (p. 872).” They further state, “...the results chapter for a quantitative study should not include discussion and interpretation of the results. This is not

so with qualitative studies, which by their very nature emphasize interpretation (p. 872).” This was especially true when using portraiture methodology and this study’s results to sketch, shape, and mold the story and the resulting portrait that captured the essence of the following case study.

The Case of Walt Whitman High School

First visit, sketching the portrait

My first visit to Walt Whitman High School took place on a cold winter midwestern day. There was a lot of fresh snow on the ground, and the wind was blowing hard. As I exited the aboveground train at 8:30 a.m., the first thing I noted was the beautiful grand buildings, both old and new, overlooking a grand lake that makes up a picturesque university campus (see Figure 1). As I traveled the four blocks towards the high school, it became apparent the community in which Walt Whitman High School is located is in a middle to upper class neighborhood (Figure 2.2), full of renovation, an upsurge of expansion and remodeling of old one- and two-family homes and multi-dwellings apartment buildings (see Figures 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). In addition, there is university housing interspersed within this community, making it difficult to discern differences between residential housing and university housing, thus creating a neighborhood sense of wholesomeness. (Figures 5, 5.1, 5. 2)

Before reaching Walt Whitman High School, I passed by another school building. This facility is different in that Snyder High School² is housed on the second and third floors of a building that also houses an elementary school on the first floor and a Head Start program elsewhere in the building (Figures 6, 6.1). This building and school facility adjoin a large Catholic church. As I walked the two blocks past Snyder High School and the Catholic Church, I came to the back of a large structure that can be mistaken for a power plant with a

30-foot chimney pouring out white smoke (Figure 7). Looking at this structure from the back, I noted that the building has three main sections separated by quads that are used for parking. Next to this edifice, there is a very large traditional looking school building that happens to be PS 181 Elementary School.³

As I reached the front of this picturesque structure, it became clear that the structure is in fact Walt Whitman High School. It has three marble staircases that lead to three sizeable doors; however, only the middle door opens to the main lobby. As I entered the lobby, I approached metal detectors that led to the center vestibule that showcases flags, which I refer to as the ‘Hall of Flags’, and that represent the regions of the world from which the students originated.

I arrived at the school at 9:10 a.m., and as I walked towards the main office, the first thing that I noted was all the students wearing name tags and a sign that stated “all student must show their name tags at all times”. As I waited for the Vice-principal, an upset student, (an African American male, I assume was a freshman) came into the office because someone told him he needed a new name tag. He was upset because he did not think he needed to pay \$5 for a new name tag when his old one only needed a new hole in it. The secretary told him to clam down; she took his old name tag and made a new hole in it and gave it back to him with a new chain. The young man thanked her and apologized for being upset.

At 9: 30, the Vice-principal, Mr. Ramos,⁴ appeared and walked towards the microphone, turned it on, and asked that everyone stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. We all stopped what we were doing and recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. Afterwards, the Vice-principal continued with the rest of the announcements. As he was talking, I stated thinking about what I was going to do the rest of

the day, so the only announcement I remembered was that the boys autism basketball team had won their game the previous night, and that they were going to add two more buses for the college tour to Howard University in Washington DC some time in March.

At 10:15, the Vice-principal and I were on our way to his office when a call came in from a special education teacher stating that one of her students walked out of class and eventually out of the building. We stopped and the Vice-principal announced “code blue”; a team of security staff ran into the office; a note and a description of the student was handed to them; and they ran back out of the office. Twenty minutes after the code blue was called, the student was returned and escorted back to his classroom. At 10:35, the Vice-principal and I finally had ten minutes because he was meeting with a teacher and the parent of a student because the teacher was having difficulties with the student (for not doing her homework, being disruptive in class, etc.).

During my initial visit with the Vice-principal, I reintroduced the concept of my dissertation and went over the informed consent form. Ten minutes after we entered his office, his phone rang and he was informed that his next appointment was waiting. He suggested that I meet Mr. Vega,⁵ the special education case manager; he then took me to meet Mr. Vega in his office.

I was invited by Mr. Vega to review a new special education student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP), and attend the meeting with Mr. Vega, Mrs. Miller,⁶ one of the school counselors, and Mr. Martinez,⁷ a social worker for the school district who worked out of the school and who had been recently transferred from a juvenile detention center to one of the eight juvenile group homes located in the community. The meeting was to determine whether Whitman could meet the student’s needs with respect to his safety and the safety of the other

students and staff.⁸ Also, the committee had to determine if the student would benefit academically at the school. After a one-hour meeting, it was determined that because of the student's violent history, his age (21), and his allegiance to one of the gangs represented at the school, the counseling team reasoned that this student would not benefit academically (he read at an eighth grade level), and his violent history could jeopardize the safety of others. The student was referred to a more controlled high school.

Conversation with Mr. Vega, Sp Ed case worker and Mr. Martinez, social worker 12:15 p.m.

After the staff meeting, Mr. Vega, Mr. Martinez, and I sat down for lunch, which gave us time to just talk. Mr. Martinez started out by asking me to explain the concept of my dissertation. After I explained the concept to both men, we engaged in a conversation that centered on the need for better case workers and social workers who are in the program for the students. I asked Mr. Martinez to explain his role at the school. He stated that he works "... primarily with the group homes to ensure that when they send us a kid, the kid is a right fit for this school. I am the liaison between [the school district], [Whitman High School], and all the group homes that use this school".

When asked about his major responsibilities, Mr. Martinez went on to say, "I work closely with [Mr. Vega] to ensure that when a student from any one of the group homes is referred to this school, we are able to meet the kid's needs, that the referral would put that kid in the best possible situation where they can be successful. I make sure that the group homes just don't use us as a dropping ground for these kids. Our job is to help these kids, and if we cannot help them here I have to find an appropriate school for them."

It was also noted that Mr. Vega's special education program is one of the largest departments in the school. Funding is the main issue but there are also issues related to the

eight group homes in the area. Mr. Martinez pointed out that “[Whitman] is often used as a feeder school for many of the students in the group homes, and for those students that we do take, helping them work through their behavior—not so much in school but outside the school where we have no control. But, I have had students from group homes that actually do pretty well. They have supportive case workers and other individuals”.⁹

At 1:45 p.m. a call came in for Mr. Vega. He then informed me that he and Mr. Martinez had a meeting with a counselor from one of the group homes about a student who had just been re-incarcerated. Before ending our meeting, Mr. Vega and I agreed that I would return for more fieldwork on February 20, 2009 at 12:00 p.m.

Second Visit: data collection, shaping the story

Interview with Mr. Ramos, Vice-principal

I arrived at the school on February 20th at 11:00 a.m. to interview the school’s Vice-principal, Mr. Ramos. The interview was semi-structured and took place in his office at 12:30 p.m. and lasted 31 minutes. When I arrived at the school the Vice-principal was in a meeting with a student who believed that he was in the wrong class and had been trying to explain this to the teacher, who did not want to engage with the student at that time. The Vice-principal became involved when this student walked out of class and walked into the main office asking to talk to the Vice-principal, saying “May I please talk to Mr. Ramos; I am going to hurt that dude if I don’t talk to him now”.

After resolving that immediate problem with the student, Mr. Ramos began our interview. He recounted more details concerning what went on in the meeting with the student who believed he was in the wrong class. In terms of temperament, this student had

acknowledged that he has a ‘short fuse’ and was ‘ready to blow’. Mr. Ramos responded to the student by saying, “you didn’t [lose your temper] and that’s what I care about right now.”

Throughout our interview, Mr. Ramos talked repeatedly about ‘meeting the needs of the students’, particularly in regards to their emotional well being. During the interview I became amazed by his composure. His tone of voice was steady and welcoming; it seemed as if he were talking to me, instead of answering questions, and I was astonished by how much he cared, particularly for his special needs students. The quality and richness of the data left me with a better understanding of his role. I understood that the school’s administration is in fact the foundation that every thing else in the school is built on. At the end of our meeting, it occurred to me that Mr. Ramos is part of the architectural team that constructed the school’s culture, environment, and, above all, their special education program.

Unfortunately, I was only able to interview Mr. Ramos that day; he eventually suggested that I come back March 27, 2009, since the teachers will have a professional day and the students will have the day off.

Third Visit: data collection, molding the story

Friday, March 27, 2009, I arrived at the school at 9:00 a. m.; the Vice-principal had arranged for Mr. Vega to set up the participants for the study. To my surprise, it was a busy day; there were departmental conference teachers coming to the main office not knowing where to go next. It seemed as if many of the personnel just did not want to be at work. I waited about 15 minutes for Mr. Ramos to get everyone organized. This time he remembered who I was and came over to me to ensure that I had what I needed. Addressing the staff, he ordered, “Someone call Mr. Vega and let him know Mr. Hall is waiting for him.” About 10

minutes later Mr. Vega walked into the office; we greeted each other. He took me to the special education office where I met Ms. Moore.

Interview with Ms. Moore, Sp Ed teacher

Ms. Moore, appeared to be comfortable and content to have the time to talk to me about what she labeled her 'love'. However, we had a difficult time finding a place for this interview. We finally settled in the teacher's lounge in the basement next to a noisy generator. I began by explaining the concept of my dissertation, and we went over the IRB form. Surprisingly enough, I was really nervous, but, she calmed me down by first providing me with some personal information about herself. For example, she is a certified social worker with her own practice and has worked with at-risk school-age children for 19 years; she is married with two sons, both of whom are at one of the states' Land Grant Universities. Her candidness prompted me to ask her about ways in which she involves parents in her work with students. She responded:

It's very difficult to involve parents because I have [approximately] 60 students.

Usually when the parents come for report card pick-up, I make sure the parents know how I run my class and what I expect from my students and that every day they will have a work sheet. They don't have a Spanish book, but they have access to it in the class, and they have the worksheet to [work on at home].... In my Algebra class, there is a computer and we have 'Algebra 9'. They have access to that at home, so I make sure that the parents know that their students can be working on the Algebra at home on the computer, and they need to be working on their worksheets at home.

As we continued with the interview, I started to note that there was an amazing presence about her, and as she talked, one had no other choice but to give her ones full

attention. Her sense of self, and her sense of duty or, if you will, obligation commanded attention. For example, I asked Ms. Moore to reflect on her philosophy of education as it relates to special education students. She stated:

In the beginning, what I try to reinforce during my class is that you may learn differently and that doesn't mean that it's bad and that everyone learns a different way and as a special education teacher, my job is to teach you the way you learn so that you understand it and that when you are finished you make your own accommodations.

Our session lasted ninety minutes and by the time we were finished, I needed to take a break and think about all that was going on in my head. My notes from this interview bore a resemblance to the notes I took with the Vice-principal; the theme, 'meeting the needs of the students', was emerging. I started to formulate my theoretical framework for special education by articulating the parts of the framework such that each part is clear and distinct in relation to each other. Thus, the formation of the "analytic cubism of special education".¹⁰

Interview with Ms. Miller, school counselor

Next I met and interviewed Ms. Miller the school's counselor. Ms. Miller was not originally selected to participate in this study, but due to an oversight in scheduling, the counselor that works primarily with special education students was not able to meet with me at that time. As such, Ms. Miller agreed to replace him.

Due to time constraints, I had 10 minutes to interview Ms. Miller. Unfortunately or not, I had to reformulate my interview questions in order to search out and capture the working tools of her counseling philosophy. Again, I went over the concept of the dissertation and why I chose her school to research. Even though the interview lasted nine

minutes and thirty seconds, the richness of the data allowed me to start to discern how each department works, individually and in concert with each other, in order meet the needs of the student. In Ms. Miller's case, meeting the needs of the students, emotionally and academically, results in helping the students graduate. Accordingly, when asked what she sees as the goal or objective when acting as a school counselor, Ms. Miller responded:

Well, I think the larger goal is obviously high school graduation—that's one goal. First to help support students, freshmen through senior year, to keep them on track and help them graduate. But, in addition to that, I think there are so many other things that fall under the umbrella. Hopefully, we are helping them become better citizens; hopefully we are helping educate them on the whole college process you know how to get in and how to be successful in college and to think beyond that I think career wise and how you are going to take care of yourself and what it is you are passionate about and what you want to study, and so I think all of that is planting seeds for later on.

Ms. Miller also talked a great deal about herself, her family and the reason she is now a school counselor. She explained:

I probably became a counselor because of some family stuff I had going on when I was a Freshmen in high school and I started seeing an outside mental health counselor. I got into social work and counseling initially and was very active with substance abuse and HIV counseling. I only went back to get my master's and went into the school because my experience up to that part had been with adolescents. I just thought that I, more or less, had, growing up, a wonderful family, wonderful

education, and I thought that there are so many people that you see...adolescents... that don't have all those factors to fall into place for them.

I was, somewhat startled at Ms. Miller's openness to talk about herself and, in particular, her family. I had walked into this interview thinking that it was going to be a waste of my time. It seemed to me that she had only agreed to the interview because of Mr. Vega's encouragement, but I left with an awareness of how each individual department works collectively in order to meet the needs of the students. Even though I did not interview any general education teachers, or the office staff, or any of the safety officers, I was able to conclude through all the participants interviewed, observations, and questionnaires, thus far that the entire body of players, play a role in meeting the objective of the school's administration, which is, meeting the needs of the students. Additionally, I was able to secure three special education teachers (Ms. Wilson, Ms. Wright, and Ms. Peters¹¹), who participated by responding to the written research questionnaires only.

The questionnaire was constructed by this researcher. It was important to determine whether there was a relationship between the participants who were interviewed face-to-face and the participants who responded to the written query. Ms. Wilson, Ms. Peters, and Ms. Wright were recruited by Mr. Vega at the request of the Vice-principal. The written query to which all three participants responded contained the same interview questions posed to Ms. Moore in our face-to-face interview. (see appendix B).

Written Interview (research questionnaire) with Ms. Wilson, Sp Ed teacher

Ms. Wilson was the first to return the questionnaire. I first noticed that her answers paralleled Ms. Moore's, which centered on the 'needs of the student'. For example, the

interview question required Ms. Wilson to discuss ways in which she involves parents in her work with students. She responded:

I give them assignments that they have to do at home with one of the parents or caregivers. Also, I send home a note the first night of school, telling the parents about what I do in class and what I expect for the students. (personal interview)

I was amazed by the tone of her response and hardness of her handwriting. Moreover, her handwriting was at times hard to read. It was evident, however, that she cared about her students. I also, got the impression that she does not play-a-round in her classroom. What also emerged from that data was the teachers' diverse personalities. For example, while Ms. Moore's responses were hard hitting, Ms. Peters, whose questionnaire came in next, was more conservative.

Written Interview (research questionnaire) with Ms. Peters

I was surprised reading Ms. Peters' responses to the questionnaire. She seemed to be a little gentler in her response to my questions. For example, one of the interview questions I asked was on the factors the teachers felt impacted the number of students they see in special education at their school. She responded:

The elimination of personnel due to budget cuts has increased the number of students per class load. It makes serving them on a more individual basis challenging.

Her response to this question was unlike the rest of the participants. I had thought that she would at least talk about the group homes. Consequently, this led me to conclude that Ms. Peters was being careful in answering my question by not discussing the group homes and any other tough issues; she was conservative in her responses. Unlike Ms Wilson who responded to this same question by saying that "Our school is a dumping ground for the

group homes”, Ms. Peters was very careful when answering the question it seemed. Another example of Ms. Peters’ conservative response to the questions came when I asked her if there were any aspects of the special education program at the school she would like see changed. She responded:

So far, in my new position, I feel our students in special education are getting the best services available, e. g. types of classes, assistants from teachers and aides.

It appeared to me that her reluctance to be forthright could be associated with her three-year tenure at the school.

Written Interview (research questionnaire) with Ms. Wright

On the other hand, Ms. Wright was more straightforward with her response to the question that asked on what aspect of the special education program they would like to see change. She responded:

I would like to have greater access to assistive technology tools that can be utilized in the classroom and more help.

Another one of Ms. Wright’s responses that I found interesting came from the question, what are the goals and objectives of the special education program at the school. She responded:

To provide a comprehensive education for all of our students that will enable them to become productive members of our society, and lifelong learners.

Even through, the overarching themes were similar between the four special education teachers, it was clear that all four approached special education differently. They fell in line with what the literature purpose is needed when working with special needs students. These special education teachers are passionate and compassionate about they

students. Most of all, these teachers are dedicated to do their work and help their students (Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

Emergent Themes

Emergent themes are those that initially come from the portraitist's "first efforts to bring interpretive insight, analytical scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the collection of data" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 185). Like a central theme or thread, every participant has a life course running through, and discovering this life course is the most central part in constructing the final portrait. Once this has been discovered or revealed, then the challenge of making meaning and understanding symbols and metaphors becomes important.

Emergent themes bring forth the subject's conceptual composition (who, why, where, when, what, and how), how they make meaning, how the researcher interprets the many metaphors and symbols that need to be assessed within the context of the subject's life (Lawrence-Lightfoot et al, 1997). Some portraitists use coding as a means of maintaining their data, coding by theme. Also, the emergent themes come from all of the collective data, transcripts, audio-tapes, art works, written information about the subject and sometimes personal information known only to the participant.

Major emergent themes that were found through the shaping of the Portraiture

The themes that emerged from the data set permeate throughout the data that was collected. The concept of 'student learning' surfaced, however, even though all of the participants talked about learning fundamentally, how the different parties constructed the concept of students learning depended on their role. For example, the concept of learning is constructed by the school social worker as, "helping all students to become better citizens";

however, for the Vice-principal, the concept of learning is teaching the students how to interact with each other, the staff, and, in particular, the teachers.

The overarching theme that permeated the shaping of this portraiture was ‘meeting the needs of the student’. It became evident that this theme was fundamental to the ideology under which all parties operated (see table 2). The major themes that resurfaced throughout the portraits manifested in many forms. For example, Ms. Moore, when discussing teachers’ responsibilities responded, “I wish we had more special education teachers that really put the needs of the students first”. She continued. Some educators use special education to punish students. But when we punish students, we are not meeting their needs.

The secondary and overlapping themes, i.e. learning and team-work were also constructed differently depending on whether I was interacting with the special education teachers, counselors, or the Vice-principal (see table 3). Importantly, it is regardless of who I was interacting with, but the fundamental belief was that the students were important. Therefore, each element, even though they provided different service work, simultaneously assisted towards a student’s success.

Table 2. Major emergent themes

Meeting the needs of the students	
Administration/VP	Having the knowledge base to be able to meet the needs of those children/
Sp Ed Teachers	Give students the focus and attention they require to be successful/My job is to teach you the way you learn/ my students learn differently/
Counselors, Case Worker, Social Worker	Keep them on track and help them graduate and go on to college/Team teaching/appropriate placement/
Gen Ed teachers, Office staff, Security	Prepare our teachers and staff to meet the needs of our children

Table 3. Secondary and overlapping themes

Learning, graduation, Support/Understanding, team-work, environment,	
Administration/VP	I want to move our students so that they are included in the least restrictive environment. Letting them talk, just being a good listener sometimes
Sp Ed teachers	Well, I expect them to understand that they have to participate in the class activity and they have to do the work. Sp Ed teachers that are doing it because they are involved, and they really feel that students are capable of learning
Counselor, Case Worker, Social Worker	As an effective counselor, you have to be first and foremost non-judgmental and you have to really truly come from a place where you like it. If you are going to work with adolescents then you have to like adolescents
Gen Ed Teachers, Office staff, Security	Now I have had teachers who have come to me and said, you just added three BD students or three LD students to my class. I don't know how to meet their needs. Help me.

Table 3 and 4 provide specific examples of the participants' beliefs and practices regarding student-centered practices. These examples reflect the beliefs and actual work practices of those in the special education program at Walt Whitman High School.

Personal Reflection: Making Meaning of the Stories

The methodology of portraiture and the artistic process involves bringing into play the personal reflection of the portraitists. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot, et al. (1997), “Portraitists must be diligent in their attempt to name convergence with the language of the insider” (p. 220). One of the most fascinating themes that came out of the data collected was ‘meeting the needs of the student’. This theme originated first with the Vice-principal, and his fundamental logic was that if they as a team did not first meet students’ needs that they as a team have failed the students.

As such, I concluded that to better understand the refined construction of this high school’s special education program, I would have to construct an archetype, which I call Educational Cubism (see Figure 11), to use to display how these four separate elements work in unison to advance their students academically, socially, and personally to ensure success. As such, I developed this ‘cubic’ graphic representation of a framework for the equitable delivery of special education. This analytic cubism for special education is derived from the art world.

Education Cubism means that a subject is approached from different angles and then understood by explaining the relationships between these views. Using this principle, it is possible to bring multidimensionality to the subject, in order to understand the different interrelated perspectives.

It occurred to me that the Vice-principal in essence is the ‘keystone’ that locks the individual cubes (individual departments) into position, thus, creating the harmony that is evident throughout this portrait. Harmony means bringing together all the parts of a composition into a satisfying relationship, and a high degree of harmony in a pictorial (the

special education program) composition can produce great beauty of visual effect (the positive school environment).

Each individual cube (individual department, i.e. special education department, counseling department, general staff, and the administrative department) forms a buttress projecting from the school's wall to stabilize the student. The individual departments work to achieve a very high degree of harmony. In fact, harmoniousness is built into the whole concept of each department, which results in an overlapping leveled surface into which all 'students and staff' are integrated; resulting in an overall harmonious ecosystem.

Research Questions Findings and Interpretation

All the research questions were answered through inductive analysis of the case documents such as questionnaires and interview responses. Analysis of the case documents and interview responses revealed each participant's beliefs about children's development and learning, as well as effective instructional intervention for children and families. Initial analysis included coding all responses into a general set of codes even though the interview questions (IQ) were designed differently for the Vice-principal, the special education teachers, and the counselors. Each interview question was designed such that it would address one or more of the five research questions.

The data was compiled and the themes that emerged together have aided in answering the research questions that guided this study. The practices, procedures, and underlying beliefs of the staff in this school contribute to reducing the dreadful educational experiences of African American students in special education classes. I am convinced that these research questions have been answered, and the information has inspired me to continue pursuing this multifaceted issue.

Components of a successful special education program

Research question 1: *What are the necessary components identified by a school that serves a large population of students with special needs that successfully addresses disproportionality?*

The interview responses related to the above research question revealed each participant's beliefs about parental involvement, special education curriculum, and discipline. The participants were asked, what makes for a good special education program.

Mr. Ramos proposed a good special education program is one that consistently monitors the progress of the students and makes the necessary accommodations and adjustments to their academic programs. On the other hand, Ms. Moore and Ms. Peters both proposed small classes and resources are important elements of a good special education program.

However, when asked to describe key components of an exemplary special education program, all four special education teachers considered providing their students with appropriate lesson plans and structured classrooms important. They believed these two elements all help to meet the needs of the students. Whereas the vice-principal believes teamwork is one of the major components. He affirms teamwork is the key; "the team has to understand we're in this together". Previous research findings show that teamwork does indeed play an important part in education in general, but, with respect to special education it becomes particularly more important to work together. According to Fischer (2004), "in the school setting, nurses, counselors, psychologists, administrators, tutors and especially parents must come together to foster the best possible learning environment for a student who faces obstacles to learning" (p. 34).

This research question also speaks to parental involvement and the roles parents play in the process. Some of the most heated responses came from all of the participants when we talked about parental involvement. When asked specifically about the roles parents play and the importance of their participation, Mr. Ramos appeared to be the hardest critic. He became annoyed as he talked about his disappointment with many of the parents. He lamented, “Some of the special education parents kind of washed his or her hands [of the situation] and said, ‘hey, he’s high school. He’s 16, he’s 17, and he is your problem.’ ” He attempted to explain his frustration with many of the parents’ inaction with their children. This issue was very important to him; he talked about this one issue for about 10 minutes. Listen to his words: “That is extremely important. Let me tell you, there is no doubt that parental involvement is extremely important in guiding our children and being able to meet the needs.” He continued, “I’m sorry to admit that we are failing.”

However, the special education teachers had a very different take on parental involvement. Take for example, Ms Moore. When I asked her the same question I asked the Vice-principal her response was hopeful. She stated, “I make sure the parents know how I run my class and what I expect from my students and that every day they will have a work sheet.” Ms. Wilson, on the other hand, asks the parents for their suggestions on how best to help their children succeed. “During our parent session,” Ms. Wilson offered, “I discuss and request suggestions from the parents, as to what is the best and most practical procedure for their child.” Whereas, both Ms. Peters and Ms Wright use a combination of practices that includes calling the students residences as a way to involve parents and/or caregivers.

The topic of parental involvement brought about an array of emotional responses from the Vice-principal and the special education teachers. The three counselors that

participated in this study responded minimally to the question of parental involvement. However, all three counselors agreed that involving parents helps, but, the parents with whom they work “only come in when we have IAP sessions”. Most researchers on this subject agree that the school's most paramount collaborator in the task of nurturing a student's learning experience is, first and foremost, the parents (Wolf, 1990).

Surprisingly enough, discipline was not a major concern for any of the participants. One special education teacher did mention after school fighting, however, she did associate the after school fighting to the number of students in group homes attend the school.

The atmospheric outlook of stated goals:

Research Question 2: What are the stated goals of special education within this setting, how well are these goals being met, what roles do these goals play in the special education placement in this school, and what other characteristics impact the special education program goal attainment in this school?

This particular research question produced an array of responses, with each participant having a different conception of the schools stated goals. For example, The Vice-principal concentrated on having qualified teachers, but, a special education teacher, in particular, emphasized having the knowledge base to meet the needs of the student academically; sincerely caring about their students, in addition to strong interpersonal skills. In the brief time Vice-principal and I spend together, our conversation always centered on these three concepts. However, he was concerned most of all with the emotional wellbeing of the students. At one point in the interview it appeared that he became sadden when talking about caring for his students. Listen to this: “Often times I think they feel helpless, every so often I can sense that in them. They really don’t think that they are able to function. It is

difficult to change that mindset, they know they have needs, but it's very difficult for them to verbalize that; to express the kind of needs that they have."

On the other hand, the special education teachers believed, for the most part, the school's stated goal was secondary to their personal goals. Ironically, only one of the special education teachers knew what the school's stated goals actually professed. These teachers' fundamental ideology centered on all their students believing that they too have the ability to learn and succeed. However, they all use different approaches to facilitate learning in their classrooms.

Take for example, Ms. Moore, one of those strong teachers who expects all her students to learn. She stated in the beginning she tries to reinforce her class, informing students they learn differently and that does not mean it is a bad thing. Because she believes everyone learns differently, she also believes as a special education teacher, her job is to teach them the way they learn. She stated, "If I do not teach you [the way you learn], I am insulting your intelligence".

In contrast Ms. Wright is a little more mechanical in her approach to learning, but she too proposes her personal goal overshadows that of the school. She put forth the following thought: "My objective is to provide a comprehensive education for all of our students so that they can become productive individuals." Amazingly, all of the special education teachers, more or less, had the same sentiments. But, when asked about curriculum, all four teachers believed in intertwining life skills activities with academics, using curriculum that is geared towards the individual and employing culturally relevant materials. Ms Wilson, when reflecting on her philosophy of learning, offered, "I use as much contemporary and life-

experience relevant materials as I can beg, borrow, buy, or acquire from as many sources as possible to give my students the best possible learning experience I can”.

In contrast to both the Vice-principal and the special education teacher, the counselors had a different construct of the school’s stated goal. All three counselors concluded their goal was, first and foremost, making sure the school was a good fit for the student, and there would be able to work with the student from start to end. Ms. Miller, proposed the following: “Well, I think the larger goal is obviously high school graduation; and how to get in and how to be successful in college and to think beyond”. It was apparent that all three counselors believed that their goal for all the students was, in fact, graduation from high school and success in college.

In one of my conversations with Mr. Vega, he gave me an example of the work that the counselors do. Mr. Vega: “I have a student, he is a good student and he is a LD 1 [learning disability category 1], He is interested in a career as a nurse. He struggles a lot with his reading and comprehension, but, he is getting B’s, A’s, and some C’s. He compensates for his learning disability by working extra hard. Whereas some students study for 1 or 2 hours, you know, he will study 5 hours and he knows what he needs to do. ” Mr. Vega explained that, in addition to graduation, his job is to help the students understand their weakness, work though it, and maneuver successfully in high school and later in college.

The goal of special education is to provide appropriate individual educational instruction to special needs children. This is an education that will minimize the student’s disability and maximize learning opportunities for all. It became evident that these participants all individually constructed their own understanding of the school’s stated goals. Even though each participant thought about the goals/mission of special education somewhat

differently, they all constructed their ideology around the needs of the students in their charge, providing them with an environment that is inclusive, safe, and orderly.

What is so vexing?

Research Question 3: What components are possibly missing from the framework used in this school setting that may lead to deeper understanding of the needs of special education students and perhaps even greater success in their appropriate placement?

The one question asked of all the participants concerned aspects of the special education program they would like to see changed. The overwhelming answer centered on funding. For example, Ms. Wilson worried about manageable class size and resources. Ms. Moore expressed this outlook: “I think that special education for a long time was not a priority, and I think it has to do with money and positions that are available”.

The issue of funding annoyed the participants. For example, the Vice-principal spoke about his annoyance as he attempts to find more money for the special education program. He explained, “One of the things we’ve had over the past two years here is our LRE grant. That is a grant to move our students to the least restrictive environment. What that has afforded our teachers is the opportunity to go to conferences, trainings, workshops”. He emphasized the need for improved funding opportunities for K-12 education in general. Along those same lines, a teacher spoke of physical structures and the need for more money to hire additional classroom aids.

However, in contrast to the Vice-principal and the special education teacher, the common sentiments among the counselors concerned the need for more special education office personnel. Some of my conversations with the counselors centered on being overwhelmed with the number of cases. Not having a “secretary that worked in our office”.

The counselor annoyances with the lack of funding, could also be felt in their tone of voice and expression.

Findings from this study, and particularly from this research question, supported the assumption that funding is the major obstacle that prevents special education programs to fully support their special needs students (Mueller, 1997). In spite of Congress' reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and their pledge to sufficiently fund special education services (Pardini, 2002), funding remains problematic. All participants agreed on this one issue of needing more money. They all concurred, purposing that more money is needed if they are to adequately provide an excellent education, not just for special needs students, but, for all students.

Regrettably, however, recent analysis on special education funding, suggest that without full funding, IDEA can never accomplish its mission. It is evident that significant increases are critical to ensure a quality education is provided to all special students, but in particular poor and disadvantaged minority students (Pardini, 2002).

The impact of race

Research Question 4: Do racial differences among teachers, administration, and student influence special education decision and service delivery in this school?

According to Ladson-Billings (1999), "Race has become metaphorical, a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division" (p. 8). Many scholars have identified race for example, as an underlying variable that influences the number of African American in special education. Ladner and Hammons (2002), for example, state that educators do know that race plays a powerful role in the placement of children in special education. As such, the reason given most often for

the overrepresentation of African Americans males in special education programs is race. Thus, the importance of race, as purposed by the above scholars, influenced the development of research question four, which was intended to investigate racial disharmony in special education. According to most of the literature that study race and education, race is the number one reason there is inequality in special education (Lipman, 1998). However, what happens when race is not the issue, and meeting the needs of the student becomes the intent?

When the counselors were asked if the racial differences of the students influence special education decision, Mr. Martinez, without thinking long about the question concluded this: “A student’s racial and cultural background do not influence placement at this school. It just so happens that majority of our students are African Americans males, and that many of them come from group homes”.

It is easy to understand Mr. Martinez’s, response to this question. First, about 90 percent of the students in the school are, in fact, Black. Next, the school is a feeder special education school with eight group homes that they service. Therefore, it is logical for Mr. Martinez to conclude that race does not matter in this case. What Mr. Martinez did concentrate on was doing his job well. He stated, “my job is to make sure that when a student is referred here, he or she is not just being abandoned. One of the first things I do is to determine whether or not a student will benefit at this school”.

However, what Mr. Martinez may not fully understand is that race does matter. For example Blacks are the most overrepresented minority group in every category in special education and in nearly every state (Losen, & Orfield, 2002). Additionally, when we look at the construct of race through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens, we reach different conclusions. CRT asserts that racism is “normal, not abnormal in American society”

(Ladson-Billings, 1999). Consequently, CRT would further contend that the overrepresentation of Black males in special education (or group homes or the lower rungs of socioeconomic hierarchies) is a result of how race and racism plays out in U.S. society and its institutions rather than a result of mere coincidence or life circumstance. However, because the negative influence of race and the presence of racism have been normalized, it becomes easy to understand Mr. Martinez's perceptions of the lack of racial influences on the number of Black males found in special education. Interestingly enough, when this same question was posed to the rest of the participants, they shied away from discussing race and concentrated more on the socioeconomic status of the students. With that in mind, the next interview question centered on what factors they felt impacted special education the greatest.

Returning to the issue of economics, Ms. Miller states, "Ninety-five percent of our students are coming from lower socio-economic households". She went on to point to the one-parent household dilemma as the reason there are so many minorities in special education. Ms. Wilson, on the other hand, blamed the legal system, arguing that "many of the Black men and Black women you see in our jails were in special education at some point in their education" It seemed to me that Ms. Wilson did attribute race to the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education. However, she was limited in her expression of racial issues. The question remains whether or not race matters in the number of minorities one sees in special education. One thing is certain, overall the participants at this school did not recognize race as an issue. Given these perceptions, research question five, which concerns their multicultural training, should offer some interesting results.

The composition and interpretation of cultures

Research Question 5: How important was multicultural training to special education teachers in this high school, and which training programs/classes/in-services were found most useful and why?

After a review of the literature, it became clear, that there are a plethora of definitions concerning the meaning of ‘multicultural education’. For example, National Association for Multicultural Education, purpose that:

...Multicultural education is a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity as acknowledged in various documents... It affirms our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice (NAME, 1990).

Interestingly enough, most of the characterization of multicultural education was similar to the above, and so was mine. I entered into this study with an universal understanding and conception of what multicultural education is. What I did not have, was a personal understanding or conception of multicultural education. I really never personalized multicultural education until now; and this was made so by this final research question and it subordinate questions.

Because there were some resistance to the question of race, it was difficult to know what to expect when these issues surrounding multiculturalism were raised. The participants were asked specifically about their perceptions of multicultural education and whether it is

important in special education, Surprisingly, the participants were eager to engage in a conversation about multiculturalism. Ms. Moore, proposed the following: “multicultural education is understanding the characteristics of the other culture so that when you are dealing with a student from another culture you understand their perception.” One thing was clear, her understanding of multicultural education was personal. She believed that making her class appreciate individual cultures not only aided in their education, but also brings about students sharing and appreciating each other.

With the same joyful excitement that was shown by Ms. Moore, Ms. Wilson, offered the following: “Multicultural education helps us to understand that people are all different and it teaches us to work with others with respect and understanding”. She talked about the role that multiculturalism plays in her teaching philosophy. She argued that we are all multicultural and that teachers should demonstrate this in their classrooms. She continued, “We as teachers need to understand that just because someone is Black or Hispanic or even poor does not mean that they should not have the right to get a good education”.

Ms. Peters and Ms. Wright, seemed to have similar understandings of multicultural education, as did Ms. Wilson. (It is important to note that Ms. Wilson, Ms. Peters, and Ms. Wright responded to the written questionnaire that was supervised by Mr. Vega, and mailed back to me). However, for the participants who were multicultural, the consensus was the same, in that, because they were who they were, they appreciated the opportunity to teach those staff members, who were not of their culture, the ‘goodness of differences’. What was also interesting about the multicultural participants was that they internalized multiculturalism; in that, they were better able to adjust to the new multinational students that had recently arrived.

All three, Mr. Ramos, Mr. Vega, and Martinez, when explaining their concept of multiculturalism, made references to understanding the difficulties that many of the new immigrant students will face. The impression I constructed from these participants was that multiculturalism was not something they had to learn, but, a reality that they lived everyday.

Mr. Ramos explained that when he started at Whitman, they had a large number of Mexicans, Guatemalans, and El Salvadoran students. Shortly after, there was an influx of students coming from Bosnia, and Albania. He states: “The students we now get are Sudanese, Cameroons, Guanines, and Ethiopians”. His next statement was somewhat ironic, and at the same time it made common sense: “We have no choice, it is necessary to understand multiculturalism, we need to know how to work with all of our students.

The aim of multicultural education is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups (Banks, & Banks, 1995). One of the things I learned from this research question was that the concept of multicultural education has to be a universal acknowledgement by all of the players. Equally important is the fact that it takes time to develop this knowledge. I have no doubt that the participants from the dominant culture understood difference. It was obvious in their interaction with the students because, in essence, the staff at this school had a high degree of respect for their students.

Personal reflection

The problem of disproportionate representation of African American males in special education has been identified and well-documented in the United States (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The examination of this problem in an urban school district has yielded information that helps to underscore the complexity of the issues surrounding

disproportionality. It has also provided me with an intimate look at how staffs' judgment, beliefs, and attitudes can impact systems and programs that are intended for one purpose—equal educational access for all learners. Each of the above responses has showcased how these educators go well beyond the minimum to provide their students with skills they need to thrive academically under some of the most difficult conditions in their young lives.

It became evident to me that the administration was indeed the steward and custodian in the development of a school's culture of inclusiveness; one that is directly linked to students' achievement and success. The administration emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and professional growth, which maintain a stable environment for all of its students. In the following chapter, I will present the studies limitations, implications, discussion, and recommendations for future studies.

Figure 1



Figure 1.1



Figure 2



Figure 2.1



Figure 3



Figure 3.1



Figure 4



Figure 4.1



Figure 5



Figure 5.1



Figure 5.2



Figure 5.3



Figure 5.4



Figure 6



Figure 6.1



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 8.1



Figure 8.2



Figure 8.3



Figure 9



Figure 9.1



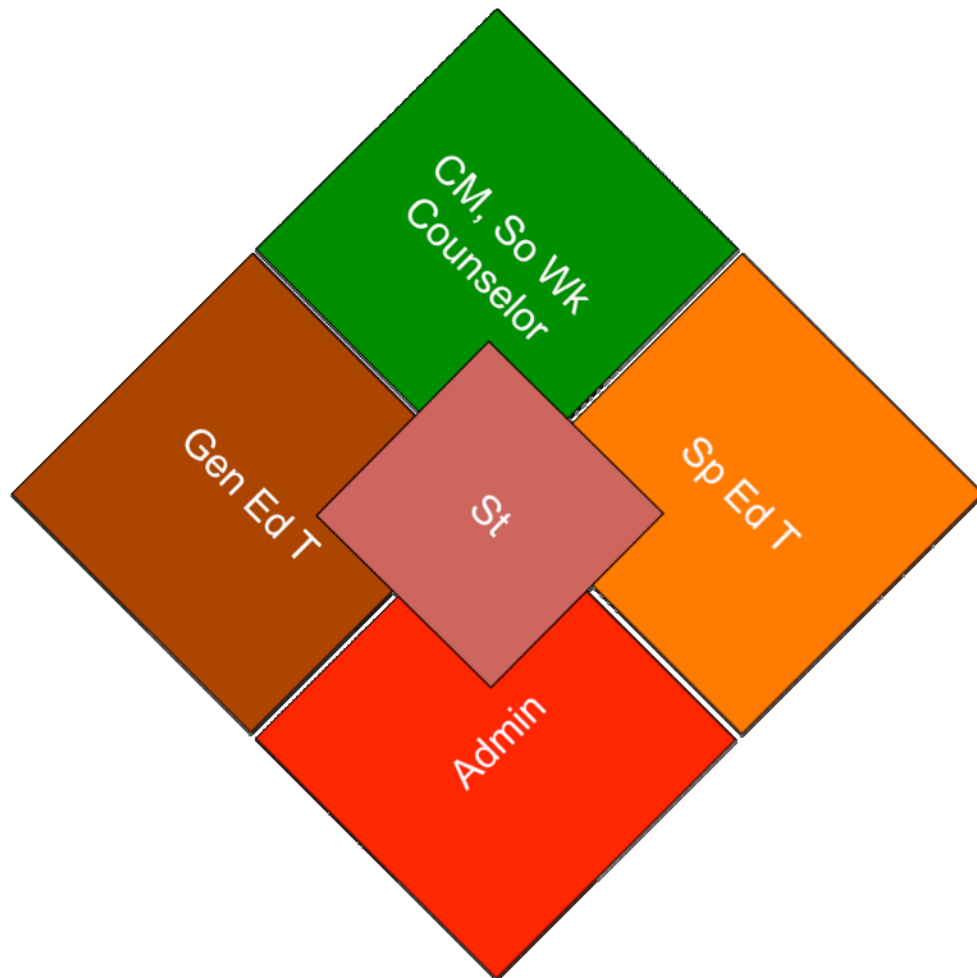
Figure 10



Figure 10.1



Figure 11. Analytic Cubism for Special Education



CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & INTRODUCTION

For hundreds of years the general public has concluded that protecting everyone's innate right to an equal education, is after all, a moral duty (Winzer, 1993). Governments around the world have constructed laws to ensure that every child with a disability would acquire an appropriate free education (Winzer, 1993). Starting in the 1960, the United States government began enacting legislation that would guarantee Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all children with disabilities. However, it was not until the passage of PL94-142 in 1975 that the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA) guaranteed the right of children with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate public education (Freiberg, 1993). Clearly, therefore, special education was constructed to ensure that all children, regardless of ability, have a democratic right to learn.

Social Construction and Special Education

A number of studies have shown that education and social policies reflect the core value of the prevailing cultural framework (Kalyanpur, & Harry, 1999). The value that a culture instills in an individual or on an individuals' background is itself socially constructed. As such, the treatment of those who are socially defined as defective or handicapped is dependent on the socially constructive values and interests of the dominant group (Delpit, 1995). If one were to give credence to the above proposition, it becomes easy to understand how the powerful ideology of the dominant group (White society) has motivated government, professionals and, practitioners to identify more and more minority children as needing special education (Tomlinson, 1982). In the early 1960s, four special education categories (slow learners, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and culturally deprived)

were used to explain the failure of low-income and minority children; while at the same time using a lesser socially constructive stigmatizing category of learning disabilities to explain the failures of White middle-class children (Gresson, 1997). It is no wonder that too often the very policies created to improve urban schools and the educational possibilities for low-income and minority students prevent schools that serve minority students from attaining that improvement (Gresson, 1997).

If one adheres to the basic principles of social constructivist conceptual framework of culture, learning, and knowledge, one would have to pay particular attention to McMahon's conceptual framework of knowledge acquisition. According to McMahon (1997), "Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and the context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding" (p. 7). In other words, social constructivism is based on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning (Derry, 1999). As a result, social constructivists have reasoned that reality is constructed through human interaction. In this respect, knowledge is also a human product, and is socially and culturally constructed (Ernest, 1999; Gredler, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994). Individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and the environment in which they live. In regards to learning, social constructivists view learning as a social process. In other words, learning does not take place within an individual, nor is it passive. Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities (McMahon, 1997).

In a study conducted by Mehan, Hertweck, and Meihls (1986) that examined how schools impact what positions a person attains in society concluded that there are aspects of the school environment that operate against students of color by dividing them into levels of

arranged sub-groups. As such, the classification determines, in part, which subjects and what content children have an opportunity to study. Mehan, et al. (1986) has argued that schools are not just stations through which students merely pass, but they substantially shape students' development and identity.

In the same study, Mehan, et al. (1986) also investigated how teachers interpret behaviors, and how they decide what students to refer to special education classes. They concluded that institutional practices, which serve to construct student identities, are a form of social or cultural practice that is developed in the school setting. They maintain that disabilities or other labels such as ("average student"; "excellent student") are socially constructed, not exclusively by teachers, but instead, are consequences of institutional, environmental, and traditional practices.

A study conducted by Patton (1998) on the discourse of special education found that the construction of school and the discourse in special education has disregarded African American voices. He concluded that the lack of African American voices in the discourse of special education has negatively impacted African American learners who are overrepresented in special education. As a result, Patton (1998) called for new script writers who could construct a new educational model that included the voices of African Americans through which solutions could be sought.

The Democracy of Education: Can every child learn?

There is no disputing the fact that large numbers of children in public schools are not acquiring the basic literacy skills they will need to function effectively in an increasingly complex and technological society (Freiberg, 1993). However, as the late Ron Edmonds (1996) has stated, every child can learn. The fact is that

extraordinary practitioners prove it every day, and short-term laboratory studies have demonstrated it. Moreover, if every child can learn, then the responsibility lies with the school system, not with the children.

Slavin, et al, (1989) has set forth the following ideas:

[What if], we stop believing that some children would learn and start believing that all children would learn? No children, regardless of socioeconomic status, would be written off. We would expect every child to achieve and every teacher to promote that achievement.

[What if], we would stop believing that students alone were accountable for their performance and start holding students, teachers, principals, parents, and the community accountable? We would establish measurable goals for student achievement and hold everyone accountable for helping students meet them.

[What if], we would stop believing that we could reach all students with our traditional curriculum and start diversifying our curriculum to meet all students' needs? (p. xix).

He then concludes that if our schools would make available more programs in the arts, sports, sciences, technology, and language, the result would be an educational culture that can better serve the needs of our children. In doing so, he argues, we would create a school culture that would stop embracing the status quo and start embracing change. Stanford (1999) proposed that with such changes schools would be able to create programs that were in the best interest of all children. He further stated that the structure of today's schools is such that educators mournfully serve children out of a sense of duty and not out of a sense of

love. His conclusion is if, “we would love every child entrusted to our care, because children don't learn from adults who don't love them” (p. xix).

While many researchers have focused on describing and explaining the low academic performance of African American students, I believe that an alternative direction is more productive. The direction I believe involves identifying schools that are successfully educating African American students within our society and determining what factors are associated with their success. (The following are examples that actually served to inspire this current study into Walt Whitman.)

The Barbara Taylor School Education Model (BTSEM) is one such school model. It addresses the specific condition of contemporary American society that makes it extremely difficult for all children, economically disadvantaged and African American in particular, to learn basic skills and develop their capacities for creativity and productivity (Strickland, and Holzman, 1989). The BTSEM operates on the philosophy that learning is collective and social, but most importantly, education entails teaching critical thinking. On this premise, the BTSEM has for 23 years educated African American, Caribbean, and Puerto Rican middle and high school students in Harlem, New York and in Somerset, New Jersey (Strickland & Holzman, 1989).

In a study conducted by Freiberg (1993) for the National Center on Education in the Inner Cities at Jefferson Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia, the researchers utilized the theoretical concept of resilience. For this study, resilience was defined within the framework of positive individual responses to adverse conditions. The purpose of the study was to empower the students by involving them in the development of the school and classroom rules and in the management of the classroom activities. Next, successful students' academic

and behavior accomplishment were celebrated. Additionally, the construct of the program required community and parental involvement along with parent-student educational classes. Freiberg (1993) concluded that schools alone cannot make lasting changes without focused efforts by all involved. He proposed that external supports can provide additional protective factors that promote student success and foster resilience (Freiberg, 1993).

The question, ‘Can every child learn?’, was investigated by Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Livermon, and Dolan (1989). They titled the study’s program design, “Success for All”. The study/ program was intended to test the limits of the principle that all children can in fact learn. A key policy of the success for all programs was to avoid assigning children to special education except in the most extreme circumstances (seriously challenged students). The study and its program is based on the premise that students with milder academic handicaps, largely those who ordinarily would be categorized as learning disabled are better served in the regular classroom. The construct of the program was to reduce the assignment to special education and to reduce the retention of students with enhanced classroom instruction, one-on-one tutoring in reading, and family support services. The researchers concluded that as a result of the study and program, in respect to retention, only one student was retained during the length of the study. Additionally, both referrals and placement in special education were dramatically reduced; far fewer students were referred for special education screening and assignment to special education during this study.

The researchers in the above cases have shown that student success or failure is constructed in the politics of everyday life in schools. Lipman (1998) acknowledges that, “undeniably, the nexus of poverty, racial discrimination, social inequality, and the erosion of the African American family’s economic and social infrastructure have a profound influence

on the Black students' educational experiences" (p. 22). However, one must note that even though poverty, racial discrimination, social inequality play a role in the educational experience of African Americans and other poor and minority students, these studies indicate that within the broad rubric of experience, teachers who adopt some culturally identifiable methods of instruction and interaction endow students with a sense of value and empowerment (Lipman, 1998).

According to Burnette (1998), the overrepresentation of African American students in special educational programs is a complex problem, and reducing it calls for pervasive strategies. Reducing overrepresentation of minorities in special education is a matter of creating a successful school environment for all students and accurately distinguishing disabilities from cultural differences. Burnette (1998) has also argued that an environmental approach that recognizes the influence of the learning environment on the process of teaching and learning is critical. It is important to appreciate that the risk of low academic performance and challenging behaviors do not reside solely within the child or family, but instructional, classroom and school variables can and do contribute to academic problems for many of these students.

According to Meyer and Patton (2001), agreeing that students of certain racial and ethnic minorities are overrepresented in special education is not to deny that some of them do have disabilities or learning difficulties. Indeed, special education may help many of these students' access appropriate academic support and instruction. However, the excessively large numbers of minority students placed in special education suggests that too many of the learning difficulties experienced by these children have been explained as "something wrong with the child" and that special education can fix the child (Meyer & Patton, 2001)

According to Patton (1998), researchers are increasingly focusing their attention on the problem of overrepresentation of Blacks in special education, and a growing body of literature is beginning to challenge previous findings and explanations (such as culture and class) on the overrepresentation. Patton (1998) proposed that his scholarship and research has illuminated a host of factors that are outside the construction of learner that may contribute significantly to the perpetuation of disproportionality and, at the same time, reveal a number of increasingly common themes about probable causes and possible creative solutions.

It is abundantly clear that Black males are represented in special education in numbers greater than their percentages in the general school population. Inadequate and inappropriate referral, assessment, and evaluation procedures used either to refer students for possible inclusion in special education or to determine their placement in special education contribute greatly to the large numbers of minority students in these programs (Artiles and Trent, 1994; Patton, 1998).

A number of studies (Hilliard, 2001; Steele & Puente, 2001; Artiles and Trent, 1994) have shown that, fundamentally, race, culture, and class do influence the disproportionate representation of Blacks in special education. However, recent studies have started to show that in school systems, factors such as biased perceptions, stereotypes, and assumptions about marginalized groups also contribute to the intractability of overrepresentation (Steele & Puente, 2001). African-American learners often achieve limited academic success in classrooms designed for learners demonstrating challenging behaviors. Self-contained settings are often void of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Consequently, African-American children with disabilities in most cases are much less likely to receive appropriate special education services. Additionally, many of the

African-American children that are placed in special education classes are being placed in some of the most restricted educational environments with little chance of success (Honesty, 1932). Special education, according to Kunjufu (2005), is in a state of crisis for many African-American children. Moreover, “special education is being used as an automatic answer to behavior and emotional problem” (Kunjufu, 2008, p. 36).

No one can argue that special education is not an essential part of education generally; however, when it is misused African American school age children become the victims of an unjust educational system (Freiberg, 1993). It is important to note that I do believe that special education is a necessary and appropriate form of education for those that do learn differently. I am a product of the special education system of the 1970s myself. However, if special educational programs continue in its present state, by the year 2020 more than 50 percent of all minority students will be in special education programs (Freiberg, 1993).

Studies have consistently publicized the inequalities that at present are interwoven into all aspects of special education (Sizemore, 1978; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Cartledge, 2004)). Theoretically, special education is not a place, but a collection of academic and counseling services constructed to support special needs students to succeed. The services provided to a special need student should be an outgrowth of the assessment process. Preferably, the combined assessment outcome should reflect the student's unique multidimensional background (Burnette, 2000).

Unfortunately, special education has transformed into a dreadful method of educating poor minorities and in particular African American males. I am not now, nor, have I ever proposed that special education or its objective was morally wrong. What I am suggesting is

that the structure of special education as it is currently is, in fact, morally wrong. What we do know is that special education as it exists at present is not living up to its purpose of providing all students with a meaningful and equal education.

In the beginning of this journey, my intent was to construct a framework that could assist in reducing the number of young African American males that are placed in special education. According to most of the literature produced on this subject that has investigated the overrepresentation of Black students in special education has emphasized the individual prejudices of teachers on the social class differences of the minority group (McNulty-Eitle, 2002; Winzer & Mazurek, 2002; Kuykendall, 1991).

The Case of Walt Whitman High School: The Epilogue

I started this voyage not knowing what to expect. My vision was to construct a model that other special education programs could duplicate. I was so convinced that the major problem was disproportionate overrepresentation of minorities in special education and that if one could find a technique to reduce the number of Blacks in special education the problem would be solved. To my surprise, the information that emerged from the data did not address the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education, but addressed, how to provide these students with the best possible and most equitable education. During this investigation, it became apparent to me through the data that the composition of Walt Whitman High School and its special education program is exceptional; in fact, their special education program is the largest department in the school.

Walt Whitman High School in essence is a special education school, in that, it is a special education feed school. As such, Walt Whitman High School's foremost concern is not so much the number of Black students they have in their special education program, but,

whether or not they are able to meet their students' needs academically and socially.

According to the Vice-principal, his major concerns are 'having good special education teachers is number one and caring, sincerely caring, about our students. Number two is having the knowledge base to be able to meet the needs of the children. The concept of 'meeting the needs of the students' will be further analyzed in the next session of this dissertation.

Findings

In this section, the study's conclusions are presented and the findings are interpreted. Both the conclusion and interpretations are put forth for the purpose of understanding how many urban schools are in fact providing a proficient education to all of their students, but, in particular their special needs students. First, the theme of "meeting the needs of the students" is presented as a conclusion based on the findings of the study and as an interpretation that compares the conclusion to the literature.

The findings of this study revealed a number of paradigms; first and foremost, there are individual departments that work in accord to support the academic success of its students. This paradigm is constructed into a cube (see figure 11) with the school administration as the cornerstone that promotes meeting the students' needs. The other part of the cube (special education teacher, counselor, and general staff), are constructed individually, however, together and with help of the administration these individual cubes collectively advance the 'vision of a nurturing and supportive school community'.

The theme of meeting the student's needs first emerged during my initial visit to the school. It was initially evident with the Vice-principal in his interaction with a distressed student and the office staff as they concerned themselves with providing that student with

what he needed. According to Leithwood and Montgomery (1982), the effectiveness of the school's leadership in terms providing students with a safe and nurturing environment, is directly associated with positive learning experiences particularly for special needs students (Mast, 2005).

In my attempt to understand and, in essence, make sense of the data I collected and analyzed, it became clear to me, in some circumstances, I was going to have a large number of Black boys in special education programs for whatever reason. In many urban schools, African American school-age children make up 100 percent of the school population. In these cases, overrepresentation of Blacks in special education classes is like Mr. Ramos stated "not one of our concerns, our concern is to provide each student with a first-class education". This is not to minimize the problem of overrepresentation of Black in special education but to simply say that we must examine the root causes that led to both highly segregated schools and schools with high populations of Blacks in special education.

One of the three underlining variables that emerged from the data was staff collaboration. It is clear that the school administration is in fact the engine that drives this polyptych (a single work comprised of multiple sections), who understand that the learning must be, at times, reshaped to ensure that the emerging needs of the student are always addressed appropriately; however, the administration is only one part of the overall construct of the cubes.

Configuration of this fresco.

The other underlining variable that concretizes this study is the open collaboration of the remaining cubes. Each particular cube addresses an actual need. However, team effect/collaboration is the glue that fastens the individual cubes together allowing for a

stronger support system. In this case, team effect is designed to provide a high quality educational curriculum and meaningful instructions for special needs children, ensuring that special need students succeed in this era of No Child Left Behind policy.

Additional findings that emerged from this study indicate that the age and experience of special education teachers and counselors are major components of a successful special education program. The recruitment and retention of qualified, committed, and talented educators is essential if special needs students are to succeed academically. The experience and maturity of teachers and counselors play a pivotal role regarding the success of their special needs students. A review of the literature shows four common factors that strongly affect retention of special education teachers. According to Muller and Markowitz (2003), the four powerful predictors of retaining skilled special education teachers and counselors are age, experience, certification, school climate, and administrative support.

As I constructed this study, I wanted to discern what role did multicultural understanding play in delivering equitable and meaningful education to African American males in particular. The information that emerged from this study suggested that, age and experience facilitates meaningful education. I was able to determine that when teaching a culturally diverse student population, educators need to understand the micro-cultures that exist in the student's community. Recent studies revealed that, in general, Black males are challenged in numerous ways, not only in the classroom but outside the classroom. Educators who understand their students' challenges, and understand that their behavior and emotional problems are symptoms of the root causes, adjust their attitudes and instruction to meet the needs of their students. According to Gollnick, & Chinn, (1991) 'a teacher's behavior in the classroom is a key factor in helping all students reach their potential, regardless of gender,

ethnicity, age, religion, language, or exceptionality” (p. 5). Understanding the cultural background of students is in essence a key component for helping special needs students succeed.

At no time in our history has there been greater diversity in our student populations in U. S. schools. At Walt Whitman, the student population is composed of children from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador Bosnia, Albania and, more recently, children from Sudan, Cameroon, Ghana, and Ethiopia. Students entering today’s public school system bring with them a wider array of culture, ethnicity, language, and ability than ever before. Teachers, in order to work with this diversity, must be able to create curricula that adequately represent this profile. Impacting the educational conditions of a multicultural student population demands a transformation of ideology and practice at all levels. Students with special needs and backgrounds bring to school a plethora of challenges that must be solved first. When teachers understand these challenges they are better able to assist special needs students in their educational attainment. However, more information needs to be ascertained in order to fully construct a paradigm that is inclusive of a population that is multicultural and multinational in its make-up.

Limitations and delimitations

Limitations of this study include limited timing for data collection and limited access to the setting. Interviews were primarily conducted during the spring of 2009 semester at the school. Additionally, the participants did not include general education teachers or teachers with less than 10 years experience in the workforce. An additional limitation of this study was none of the African American teachers were willing to participate in this study. All three teachers had stated that in the past, they were

misunderstood and had decided not to participate in any more studies.

Delimitations of the study included limited sample size. Moreover, shortness of study did not give participants enough time to engender trust. These findings were related to one school administration, four special education teachers, one special education case manager, one school counselor, and one school district social worker. Only those individuals involved with special education students participated. Furthermore, this exclusion was intentional to provide a perspective of personal experience of teachers and staff who have worked with special education students all their careers. No special education models (i.e. collaborative teaching, special education inclusive model), were represented. Nevertheless, enough data were collected for me to adequately analyze and interpret the findings.

Implications for further research

Our nation's schools are serving a growing number of students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Many of our schools are not equal in countless of ways. However, there are some schools that are successfully serving a large number of Black students who are in special education for whatever reason. The analysis of my data, and more so, the accompanying literature and Dipaola and Welther-Thomas (2003), suggest the Vice-principal at Walt Whitman High School is the cornerstone¹² in providing appropriate educational opportunities for special needs students. I believe further research is needed to clarify the roles of principal and vice-principals and their impact on special education programs. I would argue, there is a critical relationship between principals, vice-principals and special education that should be further studied.

Final thoughts

Researchers have previously demonstrated how the culture of schools treats disadvantaged students. We know that students outside the dominant race, ethnicity, or culture are twice as likely to be placed in some of the most restricted classrooms. We also know that African American students are more than three times as likely to be placed in special education classes for mental retardation (MR), emotional disturbance (ED), and learning disability (LD). We also know that once placed in these programs, the likelihood of them transitioning out with an appropriate well-balanced education is minimal. We know that for many of these individuals, their future is bleak (Cross, 2002). We also know that a significantly high proportion of previous studies have substantiated the problem.

Derrick Bell (1992) exclaimed, in his 'Chronicle of the Sacrificed Black Schoolchildren', "All the Black school age children had just disappeared" (p. 102). I contend that all the Black school-age children are disappearing into a world of hardship, despair, and academic and social dysfunction called special education. It became apparent through this study that special education is bigger than just the overrepresentation of young Black men in special education. At the start of my doctoral studies, I recognized that my dissertation was going to examine the difficulties African American males experience in special education. At first I did not know what aspect of special education I was to investigate, or how, I was going to get that data I would need. However, after countless conversations with my major professors Dr. Leigh and Dr. Sommerville, we decided to first understand all the paradigms that surround the construction of special education and its dilemma.

With the help of my professor, Dr Leigh, who first introduced me to Dr. Lawrence-Light and Hoffmann-Davis' (1997), *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, a relatively new

qualitative methodology, and some inspiration from the literature, I became interested in understanding the components of a successful special education program where, even though they are highly represented in special education, Blacks are still advancing academically and socially.

In the process of shaping this portraiture, it dawned on me that like the fresco of the Sistine Chapel, which is made up of multiple panels that had to be completed individually by many different artists, so it is with special education. Special education is also constructed of multiple panels (multiple problems); no one approach can repair this troubled fresco. I suggest that in order to restore special education to its initial proposition, it is going to take a collection of dedicated educators (Critical Race theorists, multiculturalists), all working together on different elements of the problem.

¹ The name of the high school and its location have been changed for privacy purposes.

² The name of the high school has been changed for privacy purposes.

³ The name of the elementary school has been changed for privacy purposes.

⁴ The individual's name was changed for purposes of confidentiality.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ This issue comes back up in a later interview with a Sp Ed teacher.

⁹ This issue will be addressed later in this chapter

¹⁰ I will discuss this framework in more detail in chapter 5.

¹¹ The individuals' names were changed for purposes of confidentiality.

¹² Cornerstones are laid in the northeast corner because the northeast is the point of beginning.

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APPENDIX A

**Interview Questions for Special Education Teachers, Counselors, Vice-principal,
Special education case manager, and Social worker; and
research questionnaire**

Interview Questions for Special Education Teachers

1. Tell me about your role in working with students in special education.
2. How are students identified for special education at [Name of school]?
3. Do you think more African-Americans are identified than White students?
() YES () NO Please explain.
4. Do you think race impacts special education? () YES () NO Please explain.
5. Do standards-based instruction and the climate of testing and accountability impact the services student in special education receive? () YES or () NO Please explain.
6. What do you see as contributing factors to your success in the classroom? Please explain.
7. Are there any factors that you feel impact the numbers of students you see in special education? Please explain.
8. What do you see as the goal(s) of special education? Do we meet that/those goal(s)?
9. Are there any factors that you feel impact the numbers of students you see in special education? Please explain.
10. Is there any additional information you would like to share with me today about special education in [Name of school]?

Questionnaire for Special Education teachers.

Thank you in advance for participating.

1. What does teaching special education mean to you? Please explain.
2. How long have you worked in the area of special education?

Number of years?
3. What preparation do special education teachers receive that contributes to their success? Please explain.
4. What training/classes/in-services have you attended as a special education teacher?
5. Which training/classes/in-services did you find most useful and why?
6. What made you decide to become a special education teacher?
7. Is there any aspect of the special education program at [Name of school] that you would like to change? Please explain.
8. What is your role in the identification, referral and evaluation process for students suspected as having a need for special education?
9. What do you think is the most important characteristic of a special education teacher?
10. What is your philosophy of teaching?

Interview Questions for Counselor

Thank you in advance for participating.

8. Tell me about your role in working with students in special education.
9. What do you see as the main role of a special education disability counselor? Please explain.
10. What influenced you to become a special education disability counselor?
Please explain.
A. What makes you want to work at [Name of school]? Please explain.
11. How are students identified for special education at [Name of school]? Please explain.
12. What is the counseling theory or approach that you most closely follow?
13. What do you see as the goal(s) of special education? Does this program meet that/those goal(s)? Please explain
14. What do you think is most important characteristic of a special education disability counselor? Please explain.
15. Are there any factors that you feel impact the numbers of students we see in special education? Please explain.
9. What makes for a good special education program?
10. Is there any additional information you would like to share with me today about special education in [Name of school]?

**Interview Questions for Special Education Case Manager,
and Social worker**

Thank you in advance for participating.

11. How long have you worked in the area of special education?

Number of years?

12. What preparation do special education disability counselors receive that contributes to their success? Please explain.

13. What training/classes/in-services have you attended as a special education teacher?

14. Which training/classes/in-services did you find most useful and why?

15. What made you decide to become a special education teacher?

16. Is there any aspect of the special education program at [Name of school] that you would like to change? Please explain.

17. What is your role in the identification, referral and evaluation process for student suspected as having a need for special education?

Interview Questions for High School Vice-Principal

Thank You in advance for participating

1. Describe ways you contribute to or facilitate collegial support and staff morale.
2. What does a safe, supportive, encouraging environment look like in your school?
3. How do you go about creating and nurturing a safe, supportive, encouraging school environment?
4. What role do parents and adult family members have in the school?
5. What do you expect of students' parents and adult family members?
6. When dealing with a discipline problem with a student, what is your major concern?
7. How would you deal with an angry, irate parent?
8. Please describe the role you feel parents should play in the operation of the school and highlight how you will engage parents of high-risk students in the school process.
9. What makes for a good special education program?
10. Is there any additional information you would like to share with me today about special education in [Name of school]?